# LIBERTY OR DEATH

## LATIN AMERICAN CONFLICTS, 1900–70

PHILIP JOWETT

OSPREY

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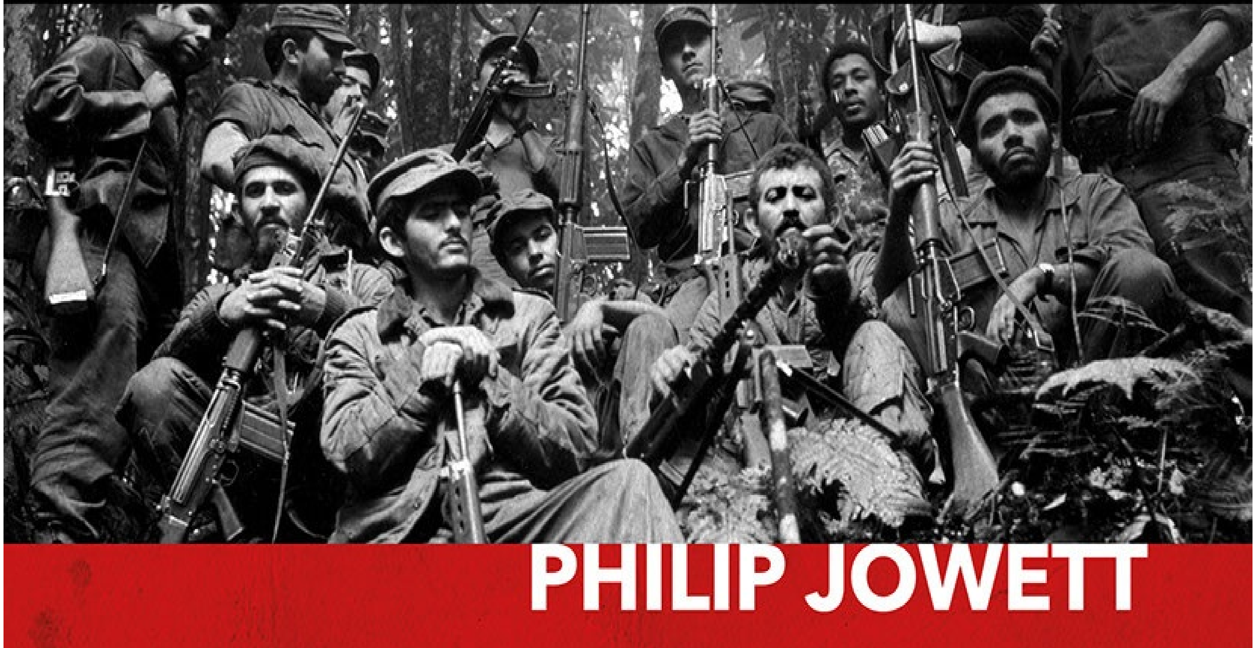

PHILIP JOWETT

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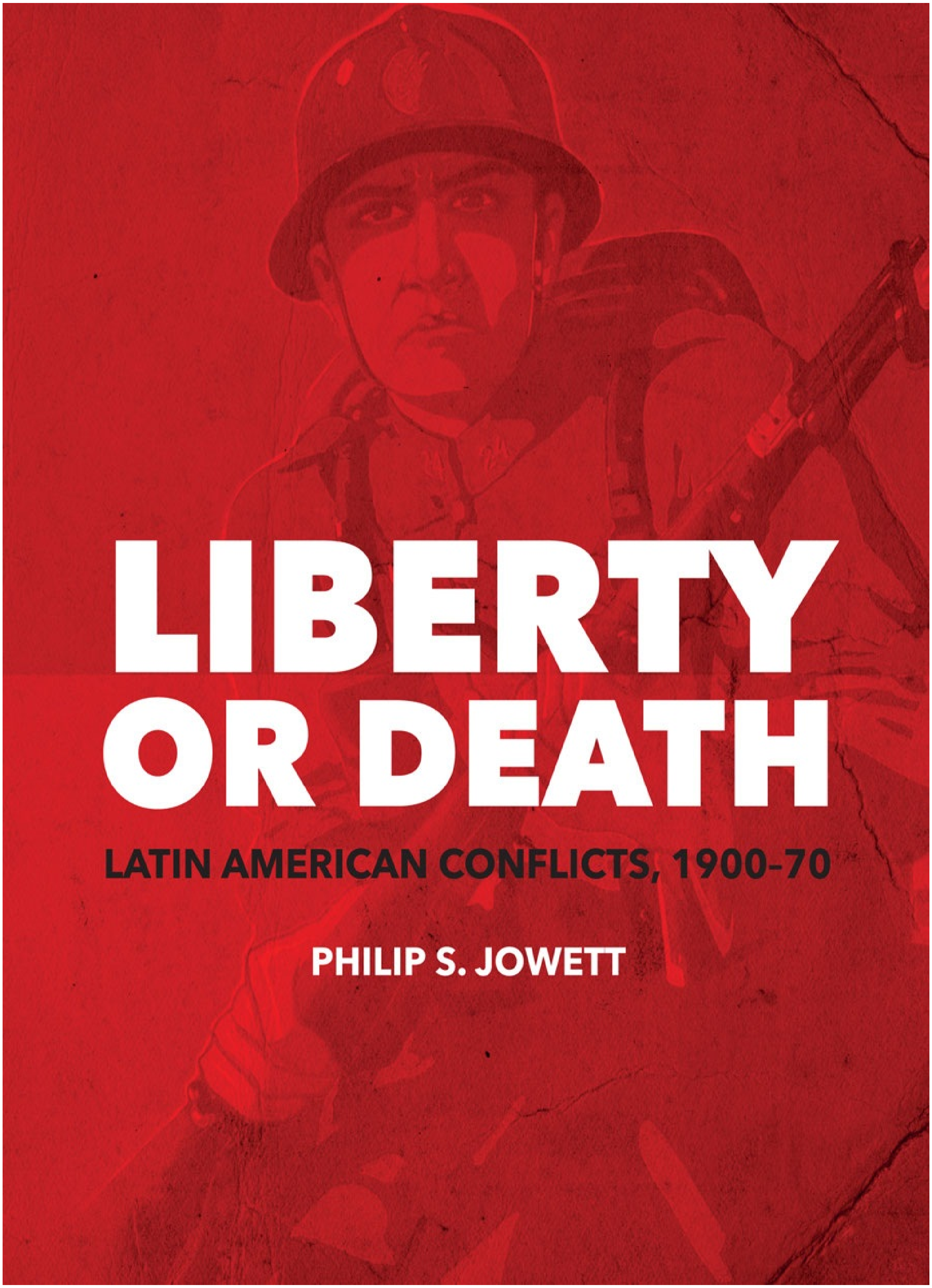

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## LATIN AMERICAN CONFLICTS, 1900–70

PHILIP S. JOWETT

# DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to my wife.

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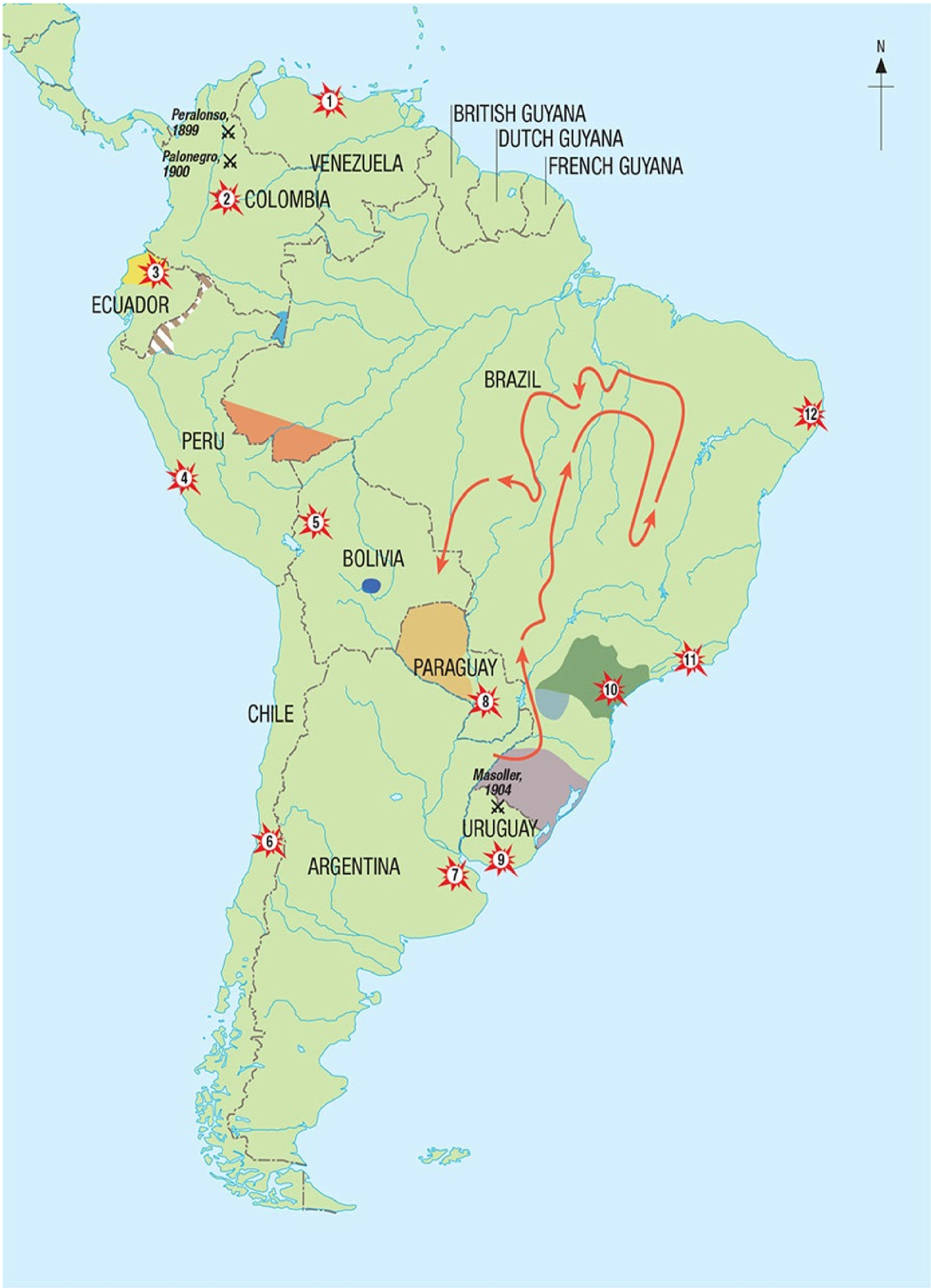
About the Author

This book covers an interesting period of military history in Latin America. Some of the most fascinating conflicts in Latin American history took place between 1900 and 1970. During this 70-year period most Latin American countries, and their often-impoverished populations, suffered from political and military conflict. Latin America is generally defined as the regions of the American continent where Latin languages – Spanish, Portuguese and French – are spoken. Geographically, we understand Latin America to be the southern part of North America or Mexico, the Central American Isthmus, and the South American sub-continent. Usually included in geographical Latin America are the Caribbean islands of Cuba and Hispaniola. The latter is divided between the Spanish-speaking Dominican Republic and French-speaking Haiti. Wars have taken place in Latin America for centuries, but the independence of the provinces of the Spanish and Portuguese empires won in the early 19th century brought a new dimension to the conflicts. The wars were now fought between the newly independent Latin American countries over territory and borders drawn by colonial powers before the 1820s. Nearly all of the new states were republics and these jealously protected territory won in years of struggle with the Spanish Army. The only exception was Brazil where, from 1821 to 1889, direct Portuguese rule was replaced by a Portuguese emperor ruling the Empire of Brazil. When the last emperor was deposed, the whole of Latin America was, at least nominally, ruled by civilian governments. In almost every country, these governments were dominated by their respective liberal or conservative party. The two main parties in most countries fought politically and often militarily for control. Between the 1820s and 1860s there were a number of civil wars in Argentina, while Chile had a civil war from 1829 to 1830 and a revolution in 1851. Chile also fought the War of Confederation against an alliance of Peru and Bolivia between 1836 and 1839. Peru had previously fought a war against Gran-Colombia in the late 1820s, while the Brazilian Empire was threatened by Republican revolts between 1845 and 1855. Uruguay was plagued by a series of wars, fought over control of the government by its Liberal and Conservative parties, which lasted from 1839 to 1863. From 1859 to 1863, Venezuela was torn apart by the so-called Federal War, fought by armies of a few thousand men but with a high attrition rate amongst the Federalist and Conservative armies. In the last few decades of the 19th century, there had been a large number of conflicts in Latin America, two of the largest involving three or more nations. The first, in 1864, involved an alliance of two of the most powerful nations in the region, Argentina and Brazil. With the assistance of Uruguay, this so-called Triple

Alliance totally destroyed Paraguay. By the end of the War of the Triple Alliance in 1870 the already impoverished Paraguay, led by the megalomaniac President Francisco Solano Lopez, had been bled dry and there were only 28,000 males left in the country. The next pan-South American conflict, in 1879, was again fought for territory and dominance. In a four-year war against the dual alliance of Peru and Bolivia, Chile fought to gain valuable land on the Pacific coast from the weaker of its adversaries, Bolivia. Chile's victory left Bolivia landlocked, sowing the seeds for Bolivia's attempt to seize territory from Paraguay in order to gain control of the Paraguay River – and thus access to the Atlantic Ocean – during the Chaco War of 1933–35 nearly 50 years later.

At the beginning of our period, there were a number of wars that had erupted in the last years of the 19th century which were to continue into the 20th century. For the next 70 years, Latin America witnessed a wide variety of conflicts, from skirmishes between a few hundred men to wars involving 100,000 troops. The combatants ranged from poorly armed guerrilla fighters and irregulars with machetes to conventional armies equipped with tanks, jets and all the paraphernalia of modern war. Although I have generally charted events chronologically, the complex nature of Latin American military history means that conflicts were sometimes intertwined. Civil wars in Latin America, especially in the first two decades of the 20th century, often saw interference from neighboring states. Equally, some Latin American nations appear more than others. This is simply because some countries, like Honduras, were at war more often. Similarly, some conflicts, like the Chaco War, require a whole chapter to describe them, while the ten-year Mexican Revolution requires two. Superficially, some of the conflicts covered in this work may appear trivial and small-scale, but it is important to remember that for some of the smaller nations, arming and equipping a few hundred men was an expense that they could ill afford. Some of these "Comic Opera" conflicts were regarded, especially in the Western Press, as "just another revolution." But for the people involved, prepared to face death in order to gain their liberty, they were deadly serious affairs. In many cases the price of failure for those willing to fight for liberty was to stand with their back to an adobe wall and face a firing squad. This book covers over 60 conflicts, including 16 civil wars, 14 revolutions, eight border conflicts and 22 anti-government rebellions, as well as a number of coups. Some of these conflicts, like the Mexican Revolution of 1910–20 and the Cuban Revolution of 1956–59, are well known. Other wars, like the Coto War of 1921, between Panama and Costa Rica, fought for a small piece of jungle, were hardly featured in the press. The Zarumilla War of 1941 was fought during the early stage of World War II and involved tanks, bombers, and submarines. Few outside Latin America were even aware of the conflict, which was a “life or death” struggle for Peru and Ecuador.

It is hoped that the reader will find the military history of Latin America of interest and, given the ongoing instability, poverty, and bloodshed in the region, that the subject will receive wider exposure.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Peralonso, 1899
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Territory lost by Ecuador, Zarumilla War, 1941

Route of Prestes Column, 1924–27

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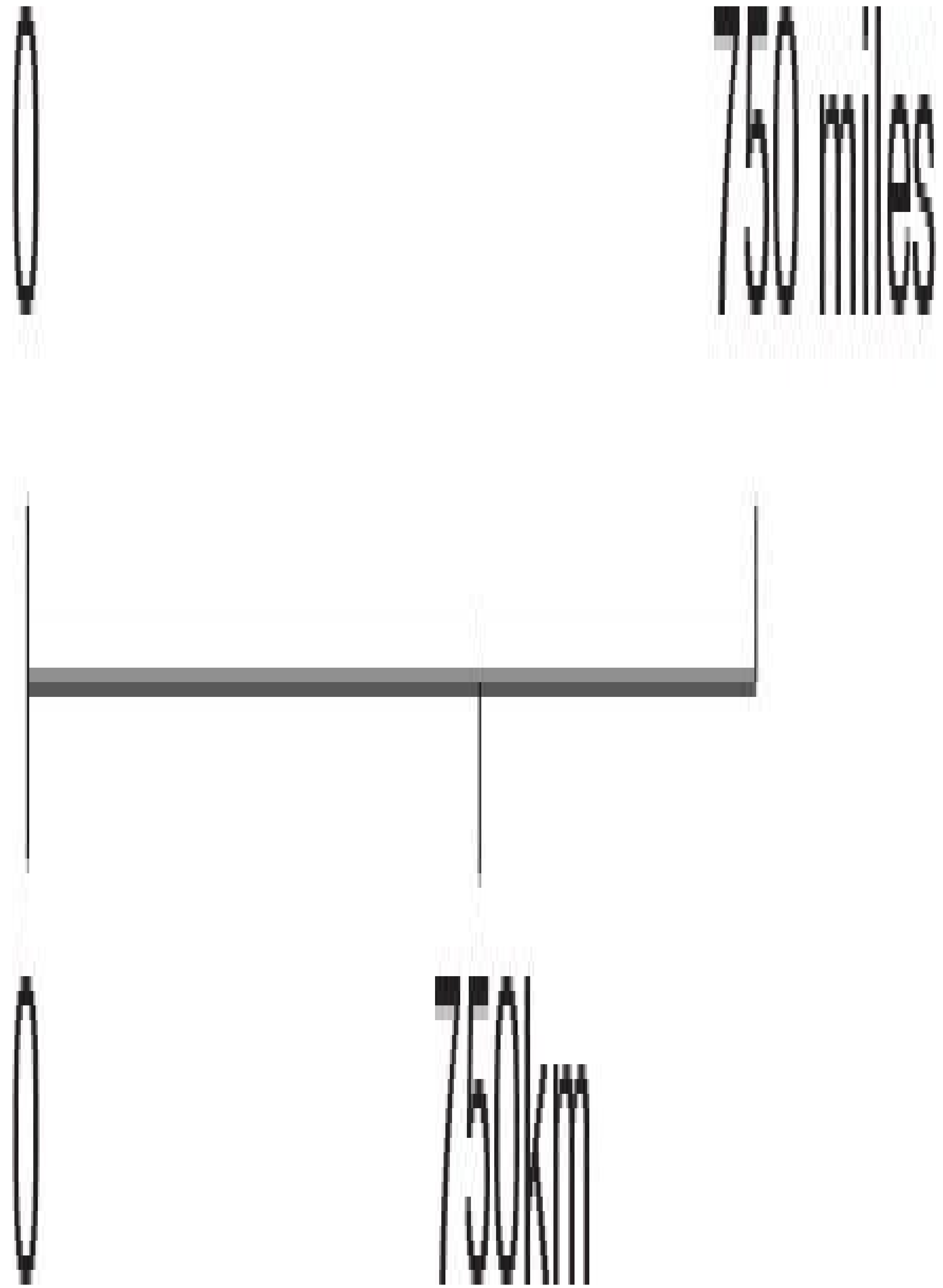
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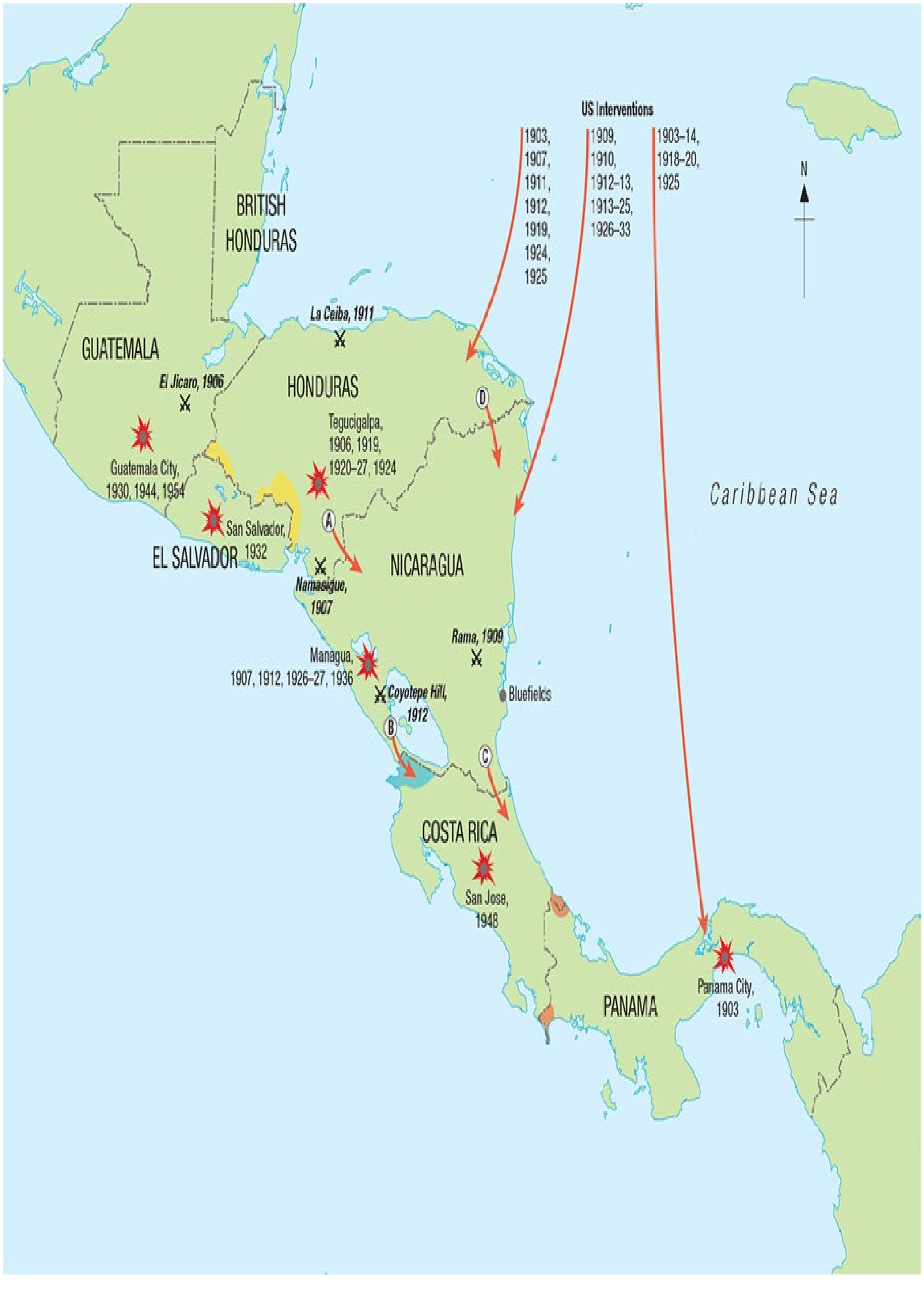
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**C Costa Rican rebel invasion, 1955**

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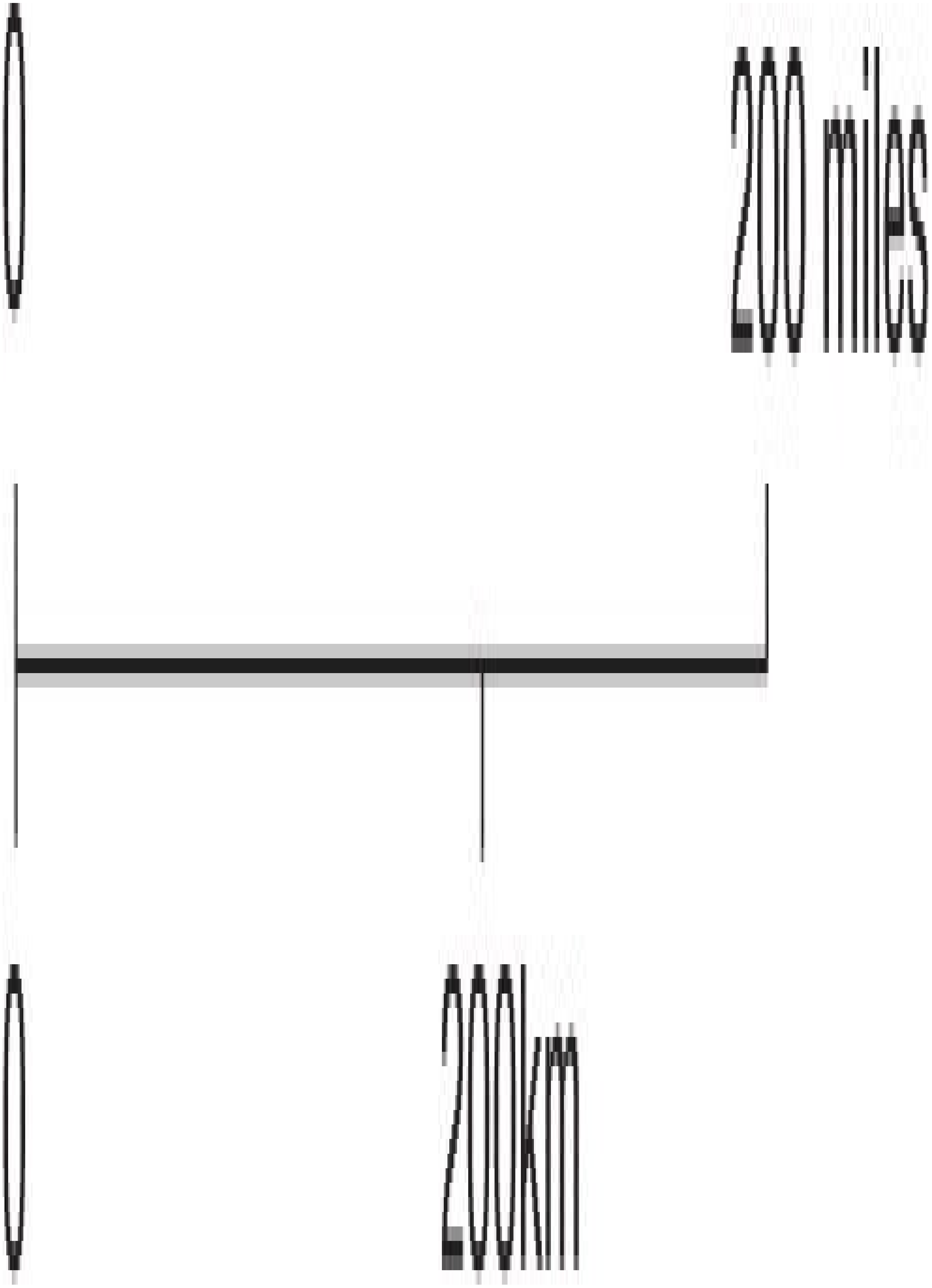
Honduran–El Salvador War, 1969

Calderon invasion, 1955

Centers of Conflict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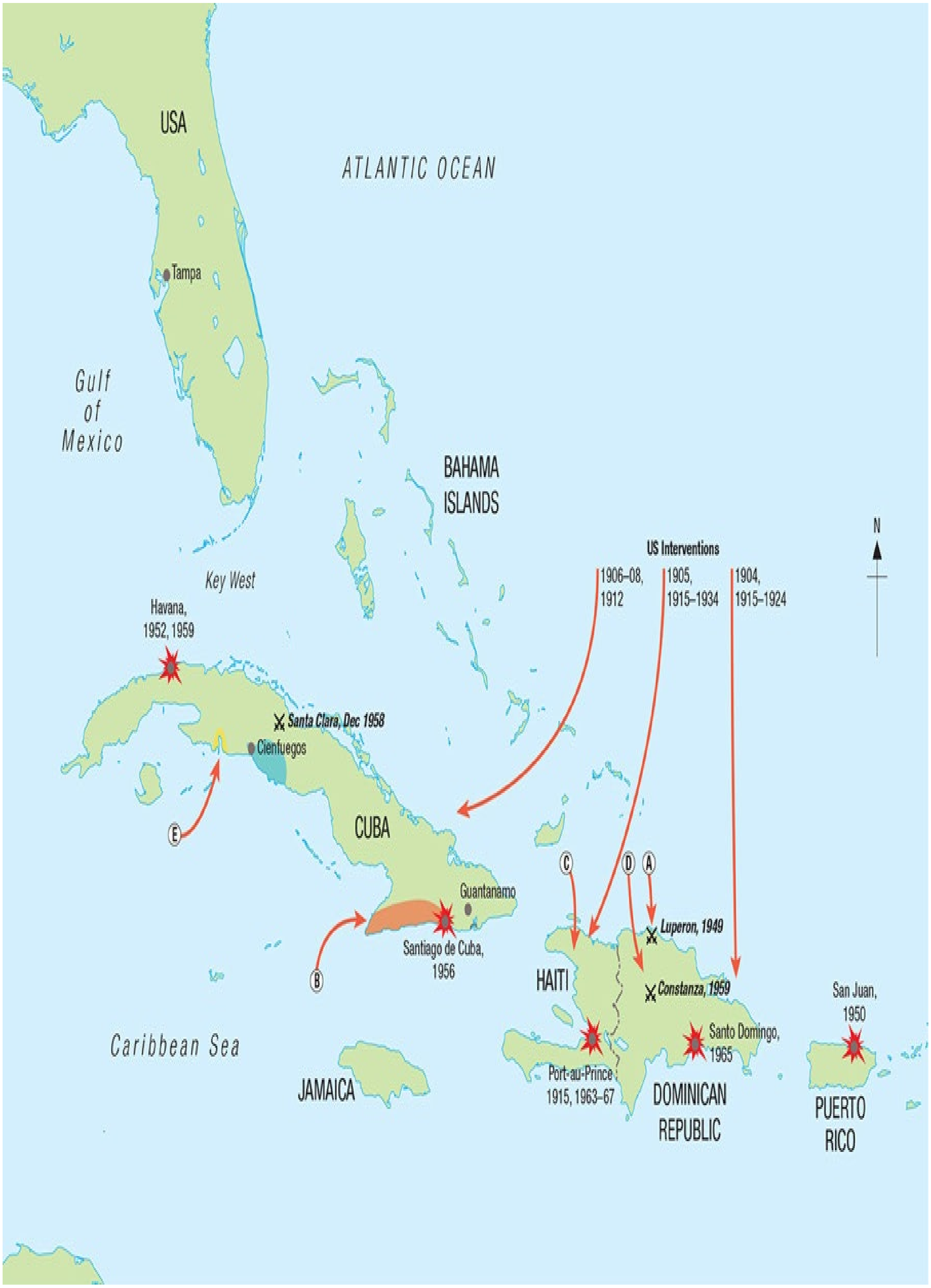
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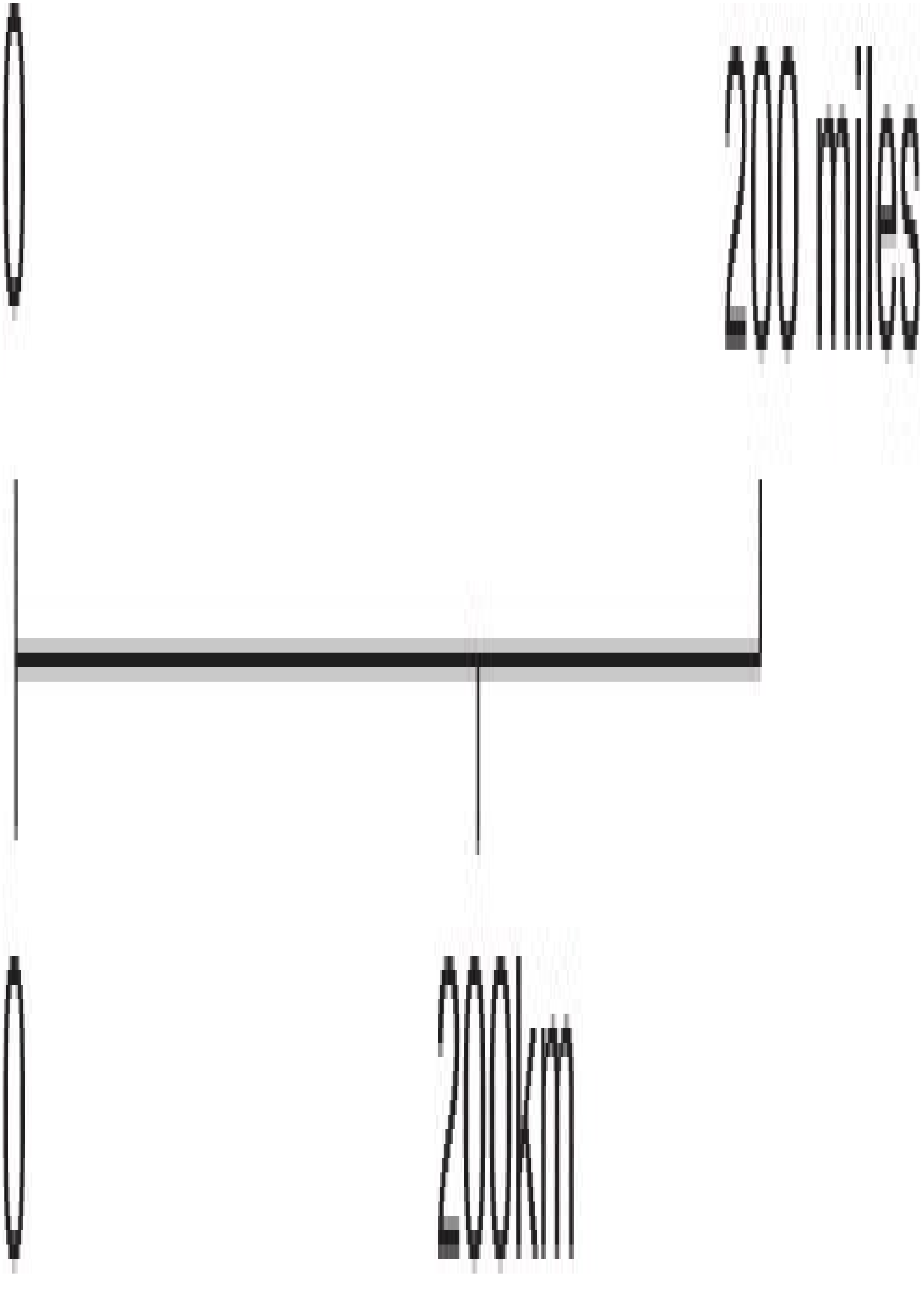
Sierra Maestra. Castro’s 1956–59 revolutionary base

Bay of Pigs invasion 1961

Sierra Escambray. Anti-Castro resistance, 1959–65

# Centers of Conflict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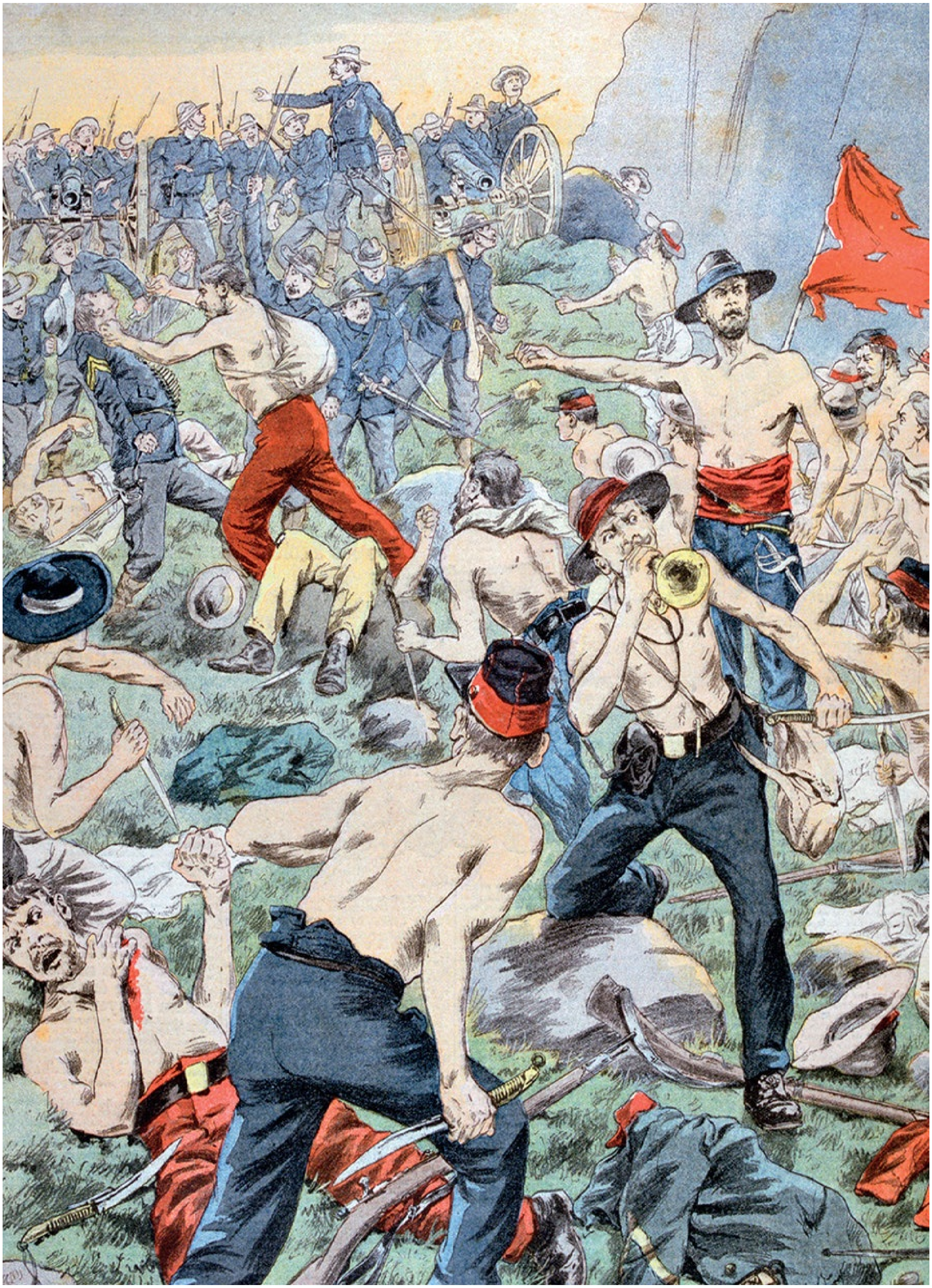
# TWENTY YEARS OF CONFLICT



**This illustration from a French magazine of the period shows a skirmish between shirtless Colombian Liberal troops and the Conservative government forces in 1902. As both armies wore the same uniform the Liberals generally had hat bands and sashes in red. In this case the Liberals have stripped to the waist so that there is no confusion over which side is which. (Photo by Art Media/Print Collector/Getty Images)**

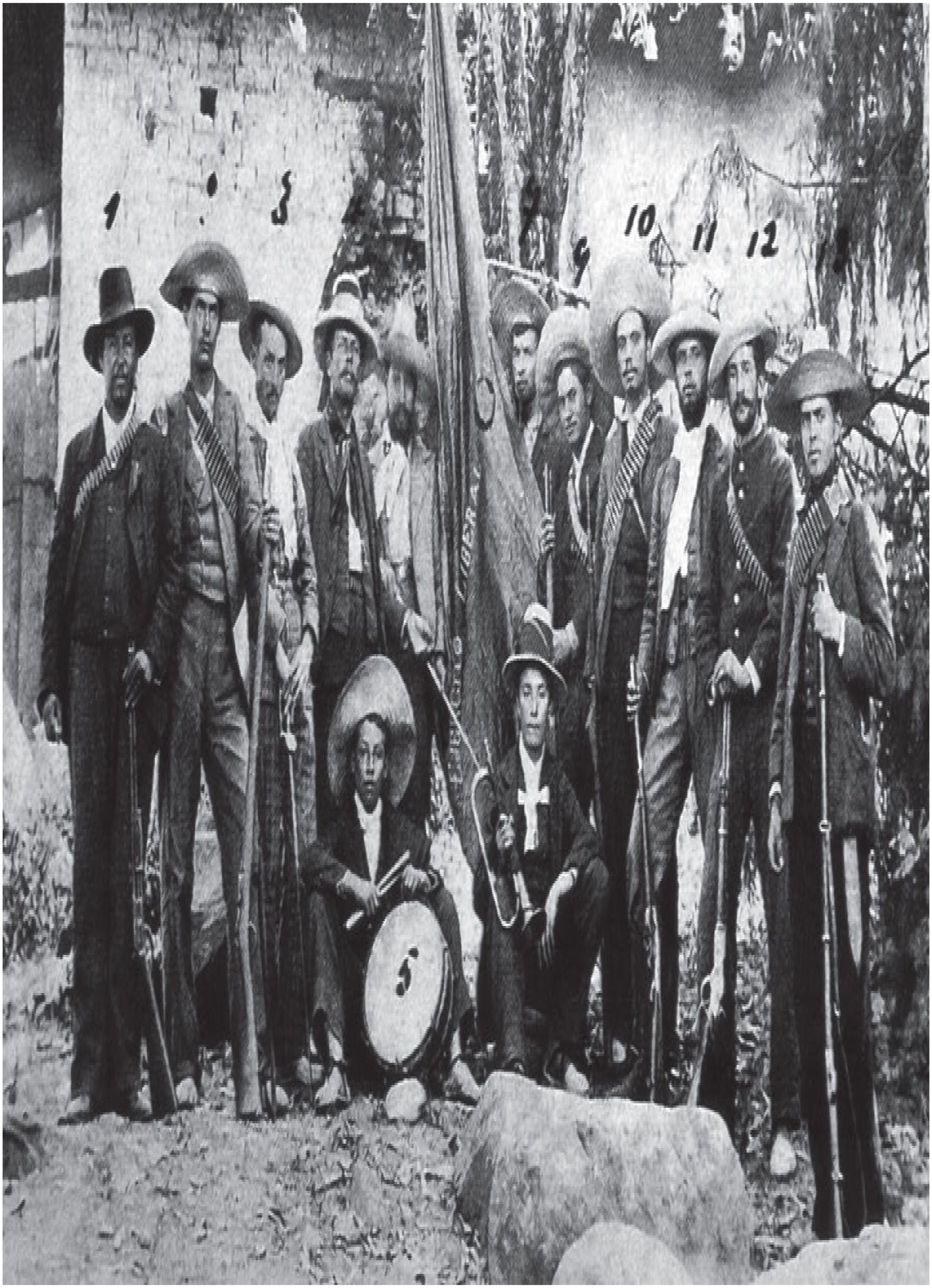
Latin America in the late 19th and early 20th century was often divided politically along liberal and conservative lines. The Catholic Church was also divided, with the hierarchy being supportive of the conservatives, while the local priests were often pro-liberal. Many said that, in reality, there was little real difference between the two political parties, although the conservatives usually ended up as the party in power. In most countries these political divisions led to armed conflict between a country's two factions at one time or another during the 1900–20 period. The failure of liberalism to bring improvements to the lives of people in Central and South America led to the decline in its influence. During the many civil conflicts which took place during 1900 and 1920 in Central and South America, the combatants still aligned themselves with either the liberals or conservatives. The greatest conflict of the period, which took place in Mexico between 1910 and 1920, was a civil war that saw loosely aligned liberal revolutionaries fighting for ten years against reactionary right-wing forces (see Chapters 2 and 3). During this same period the USA continued its dominance over Central America and the Caribbean with military interventions that had begun in the 19th century and continued in the early 1900s (see Chapter 6). On the world political front, the Great War in Europe of 1914–18 had little real effect on Latin America. Cuba and Brazil did eventually contribute to a small extent to the Allied cause with limited military and naval forces. The entry of the USA into the conflict in 1917 had an adverse effect on other American countries' support for the Allies. Resentment against US interference in Latin America meant that only eight nations actually declared war on the Central Powers before the end of the war in November 1918.

# The “War of a Thousand Days,” Colombia 1899–1902

Colombia had been divided politically into liberal and conservative factions for most of the 19th century. During the 1800s, the two political parties had frequently armed their supporters and fought civil conflicts for control of the country. In 1899 the incumbent Conservative government was accused by the Liberals of election fraud. As was usual in the highly partisan and confrontational politics of Colombia, the Liberals sought an armed resolution to the dispute. The Liberal-supporting General Rafael Uribe had planned to launch a rebellion against the Conservatives on October 20, 1899. His supporters armed themselves and brought out their old rifles and muskets from their hiding places. Although they were going to be outgunned, Uribe and his fellow commanders hoped that pro-Liberal army units would soon join their rebellion. Some Liberal commanders had already jumped the gun and begun the revolt on October 17 in Socorro in the department of Santander. The leader of this preemptive revolt, General Paolo Emilio Villar, had forced Uribe to move his plans forward. This meant that not all the rebel plans were in place but, regardless, the Liberals gathered their irregulars and began to attack government garrisons. At the start of the conflict, the Liberals had managed to raise a total of 35,000 troops, while the Conservative government forces totaled 75,000 men. Fortunately for the Liberals, there were a number of friendly Latin American states with liberal governments at the time. The presidents of Nicaragua, Venezuela and Ecuador were enemies of the Colombian Conservatives and recognized Uribe as the Colombian president. For the rest of 1899 and into early 1900, there followed a series of conventional battles between the two factions that were usually one sided. By mid-August 1900, after ten months of this kind of fighting, there had already been 20,000 deaths.

## The “Gentleman’s War” 1899

The first few months of the war, in late 1899 and early 1900, is often referred to as the “Gentleman’s War.” This was a relatively civilized opening phase of what was to become an extremely vicious civil war. In the first months of the war the two factions were looking around for arms from abroad and foreign supporters and allies. Liberal politicians were relieved to find that the Liberal government of neighboring Venezuela was happy to support them. With fewer troops and arms and a general lack of war materiel, they would need all the help they could get. One of the first engagements of the war was fought on the Magdalena River on October 24, when a fleet of converted river boats was organized by the Liberals. After arming the river boats the Liberals had sailed northwards up the river until they came across two well-armed government gunboats. In a brief one-sided battle, all of the Liberal ships were sunk. A large number of troops was lost with them, with 204 drowning. Amongst the dead was a significant number of Liberal political and military leaders, which severely weakened the rebel cause. The next major battle took place between November 11 and 13 at Bucaramanga in the department of Santander, when 3,000 poorly armed Liberals defeated a stronger, better-armed Conservative army. Most of the Liberals were armed with old mid-1800s muskets, and some were armed only with machetes. The Liberal commander, General Uribe, sent his men into battle with little ammunition, but their initial charge caught the Conservatives completely off-guard and they won the day. After the battle, Uribe combined his army with that of General Benjamin Herrera, and on December 15 they marched their joint force towards the Conservative stronghold at Peralonso. The Conservatives had 5,600 men at Peralonso and their commander sent a number of his men to ambush the advancing Liberals. Although the ambush was well prepared, the astute General Uribe recovered the situation and ordered a frontal assault on the Conservative lines. As before, many Liberals were armed with machetes and the traditional Colombian short sword, which they used to good effect. The Conservatives broke and fled the battlefield, leaving 700 dead behind them as well as many wounded, cruelly injured by the Liberals’ machetes. The Liberals, although victorious, lost 750 men in the two-day battle, and their losses in men and armaments were harder to make up.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**Colombian Liberal troops pose before going into battle against their Conservative foes in the early 20th century. The Liberal army was always at a disadvantage against the better-supplied and armed Conservatives. Less than 50 percent had modern rifles and many were armed with muskets dating back to the mid-19th century, while others only had machetes. This group of commanders are relatively well armed, however, with Mausers and Winchester repeating carbines. (Cody Images)**

## The Battle of Palonegro

After a few months of Liberal victories, the Conservatives were desperate to reverse their fortunes. Their chance came in May 1900 when a confident force of 10,000 Liberals prepared to face the demoralized Conservatives. This was the largest Liberal army put into the field during the civil war and was under the command of General Vargas Santos. On May 11, the Liberals advanced towards a Conservative army of about 5,000 men, which was dug in behind 26 kilometers (16 miles) of trenches. The fighting would last 15 days and would see repeated desperate Liberal attempts to break the Conservative defenses. Fighting in searing heat, the two armies suffered terribly from a shortage of water and from having to sleep in the open for two weeks. During the battle, the large number of rotting corpses on the battlefield became a major health hazard, but the fighting was too intense for burial parties to operate. The fighting was medieval in its ferocity, with both sides using the dreaded machete, and the injuries suffered were horrific according to eyewitnesses. With no medical facilities, the smallest wound could be fatal. Although the Liberals nearly broke the Conservatives defenses on several occasions, they were hampered by their usual shortage of ammunition. On the 25th, after days of fighting without respite, Liberal morale broke when 15,000 Conservative reinforcements arrived on the battlefield. Leaving 1,500 dead on the field, the Liberals withdrew, losing hundreds more men to desertion during the retreat. A Conservative force then cut the Liberals off; now reduced to 3,400 men, they were forced to take to the jungle. More troops began to drift away and before long Santos’ Liberal army was reduced to only 1,000 men. Although the Conservatives had lost 1,000 men, they were in a much better state and their troops now tracked down the last of the Liberals and killed them all. The Conservatives took no prisoners, and the

Gentlemen’s War was well and truly over. The Liberal defeat at Palonegro effectively ended their hopes of winning the conflict. Having led a military coup in August 1900, Conservative President Jose Manuel Marroquin was declared president for the second time. As a committed Conservative, and given his strong position, Marroquin had no interest in negotiating peace with the Liberals. For the next few years the conflict was to be characterized by a destructive guerrilla war, with at least 400 battles or skirmishes taking place all over Colombia.

**During the War of a Thousand Days, a group of Conservative troops waits to go into battle at Palonegro in May 1900. During the war the only way to tell the two sides apart in battle was by the wearing of hat bands in their party colors. The variety of hats in this photo reflects the diverse regions that both armies drew their soldiers from in the three-year-long conflict. Only a few of the men are wearing regular army uniform, with the rest wearing their own clothing. (Cody Images)**

## Foreign Support for the Liberals

In the wake of the Liberal defeats of May and June 1900, their allies in Venezuela, Nicaragua, and to a lesser extent Ecuador tried their best to rejuvenate liberal forces. Nicaraguan President Jose Santos Zelaya and Venezuelan President Jose Cipriano Castro Ruiz were determined to help their fellow liberals. Venezuela in particular did all it could, sending 200 “volunteers” and a few small ships to help create a Liberal navy. Materiel help to the Liberals from Venezuela included the gift of 10,000 modern rifles from an order of 40,000 bought for the Venezuelan Army. However, it was clear to the Liberals that they were losing the war, and despite foreign support, they were only able to raise a 1,800-strong army to continue the conflict. Eventually a total of 1,400 Venezuelan “volunteers” were also fighting alongside the Liberals, but they were simply unable to raise the numbers they had had in 1899. The Colombian Government wanted to punish the interfering governments of Nicaragua, Ecuador, and Venezuela for supporting their Liberal foes. In July 1900 they decided to support the Venezuelan Conservative exiles preparing to “liberate” their country. A force of 4,000–6,000 Conservative Venezuelans under the command of Rangel Garbiras crossed the border in late July and were joined by Conservative guerrillas under General Narin. They were faced by 10,000 loyal Venezuelan troops, who defeated them at the two-day battle of San Cristobel that began on July 28. The battle cost the Conservatives 800 dead while the Venezuelan Government troops lost 300, and the invaders retreated back to the shelter of Colombian territory. Just over a year later the Venezuelan Government decided to exact revenge on the Colombian Government by launching an invasion of Colombia with 1,000 of their own troops. When they crossed the border on August 4, 1901, they were disappointed to be met by only 100

Colombian Liberal troops. The Colombians urged the Venezuelans to turn back as, given their poor situation, the Colombian Liberals could offer the Venezuelans no support. The proud Venezuelan commander, General Echeverria, refused to retreat and some six weeks later, on September 23, the Venezuelans were defeated by an army of 1,200 Colombians. The battle of Riohacha ended with over half of the Venezuelan invaders dead and 300 troops taken prisoner, along with their commander. This defeat virtually ended Venezuelan support for the Liberals, but at the same time, Nicaragua was supporting a separate campaign in Panama.

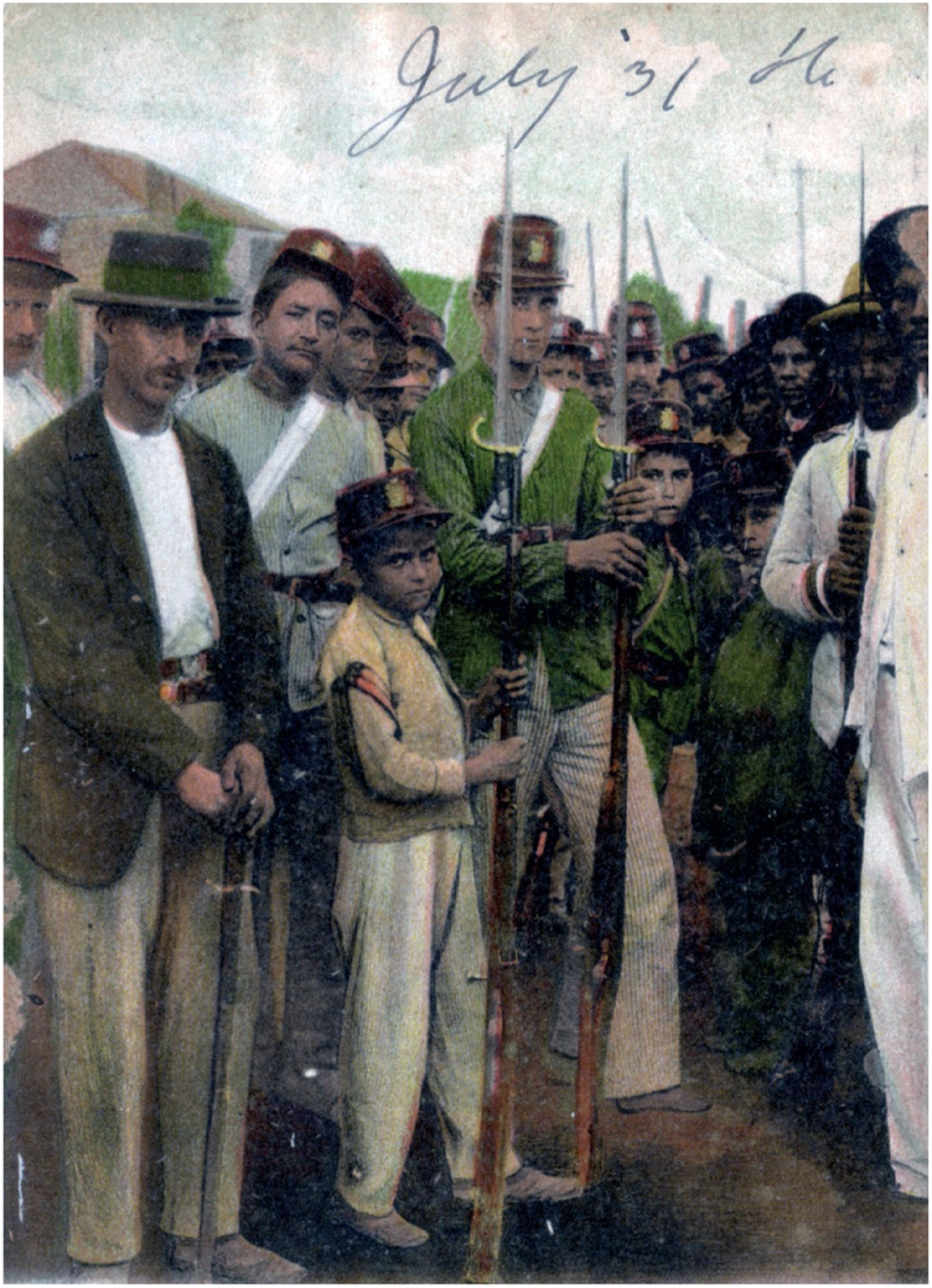
## The Panamanian Campaign 1900–02

From March 1900 until the end of the war, the Liberals fought a “sideshow” campaign in the Colombian department of Panama, which unlike the rest of the country was geographically in Central America. They were backed in Panama, where Liberal support amongst the population was relatively strong, by the Liberal Nicaraguan Government. The rebels hoped to use the department as a base for continuing the civil war. On March 31, 1900, a force of 2,000 Liberals landed on the Panamanian coast from Nicaraguan boats and attacked and took the city of David. Taking town after town, they then advanced towards Panama City, the department capital. The tortuous advance involved several months of jungle fighting and the Liberals did not arrive at Panama City until July 4. Although the strong Conservative garrison had been well prepared and its troops counterattacked in force, the Liberals were victorious after eight hours of fighting. Despite their victory, the Liberals were unable to take the city, and the garrison, although defeated, was able to resist the rebel assault. The Conservatives were better armed, with a few machine guns and light guns, while the Liberals had been given older, inferior weapons by their Nicaraguan allies. On July 24, the Liberals began a series of all-out frontal attacks on the city’s defenses that lasted for two days. These assaults cost the Liberals dearly, with at least 1,000 of their troops killed and many wounded. Overall, the battle of Calidonia Bridge was a total disaster for the Liberals and saved the Conservatives from complete annihilation. When the victorious Conservatives advanced, the demoralized Liberals had little choice but to surrender. A peace treaty, signed on July 26, was swiftly broken by the Liberals, who now began a guerrilla campaign in the Panamanian jungle. Liberal reinforcements under

General Belisario Porras Barahona arrived in Panama in August 1901 and were joined by a large number of Indian volunteers. The Conservative army had spent the previous few months attacking Indian villages, and the Indians were only too happy to join the Liberals and seek revenge. Although the Liberals did manage to take the city of Colon, supplies soon ran low and the collapse of morale forced them to accept a second treaty, signed on November 29, 1901. Less than a month later, the persistent Liberals invaded again, this time with an army of 1,500 men and a navy of a few small river boats converted into gunboats. The Liberal army advanced slowly towards Colon again, their ultimate goal being the conquest of Panama City. A number of small battles and skirmishes took place in what turned out to be another long, drawn-out jungle campaign. While the Liberals were advancing, the Conservatives under General Salazar had raised a 5,000-strong army. This time the Conservatives were determined to end the Liberal threat in Panama for good. Several thousand Panamanians had, however, flocked to the Liberal cause, and by the end of 1902, their commander, General Herrera, had 8,000 poorly armed men. Before he could commit them against the Conservative army, he received a message, on October 28, from General Uribe in Colombia. This message informed Herrera that Uribe had been defeated and that he advised his Panamanian commander to surrender immediately.

## The 1902 Campaign and the End of the War

By June 1902, General Uribe was growing weary of the one-sided war with the Conservatives and despaired at the suffering of his troops. He began to look for a peaceful solution to the conflict, while at the same time organizing one last effort to revive Liberal fortunes. He began a new campaign in the Magdalena Department in August but simply did not have the resources to continue it. His troops were fighting in rags and, in most battles and skirmishes, had only a few bullets each. Liberal troops were no longer willing to make suicidal charges against the Conservative lines armed only with machetes, and their morale plummeted. Lacking any effective international support, Uribe was pragmatic enough to see that the sooner the fighting ended the better. By October, the dismal condition of his Liberal troops had brought his last-ditch effort in Magdelena to an end. He surrendered in the final days of October and the long and bitter civil war ended in a relatively civilized manner. The conflict had cost the lives of around 100,000 soldiers, with approximately half succumbing to disease. Some estimates say between 53,000 and 55,000 Liberal soldiers were killed during the war, while about 47,000 Conservatives troops died. Many reports said that in many towns and villages almost the whole of the male population had been lost. It was also estimated that at least 100,000 civilians lost their lives, mostly from hunger and disease caused by the depredations of the civil war.

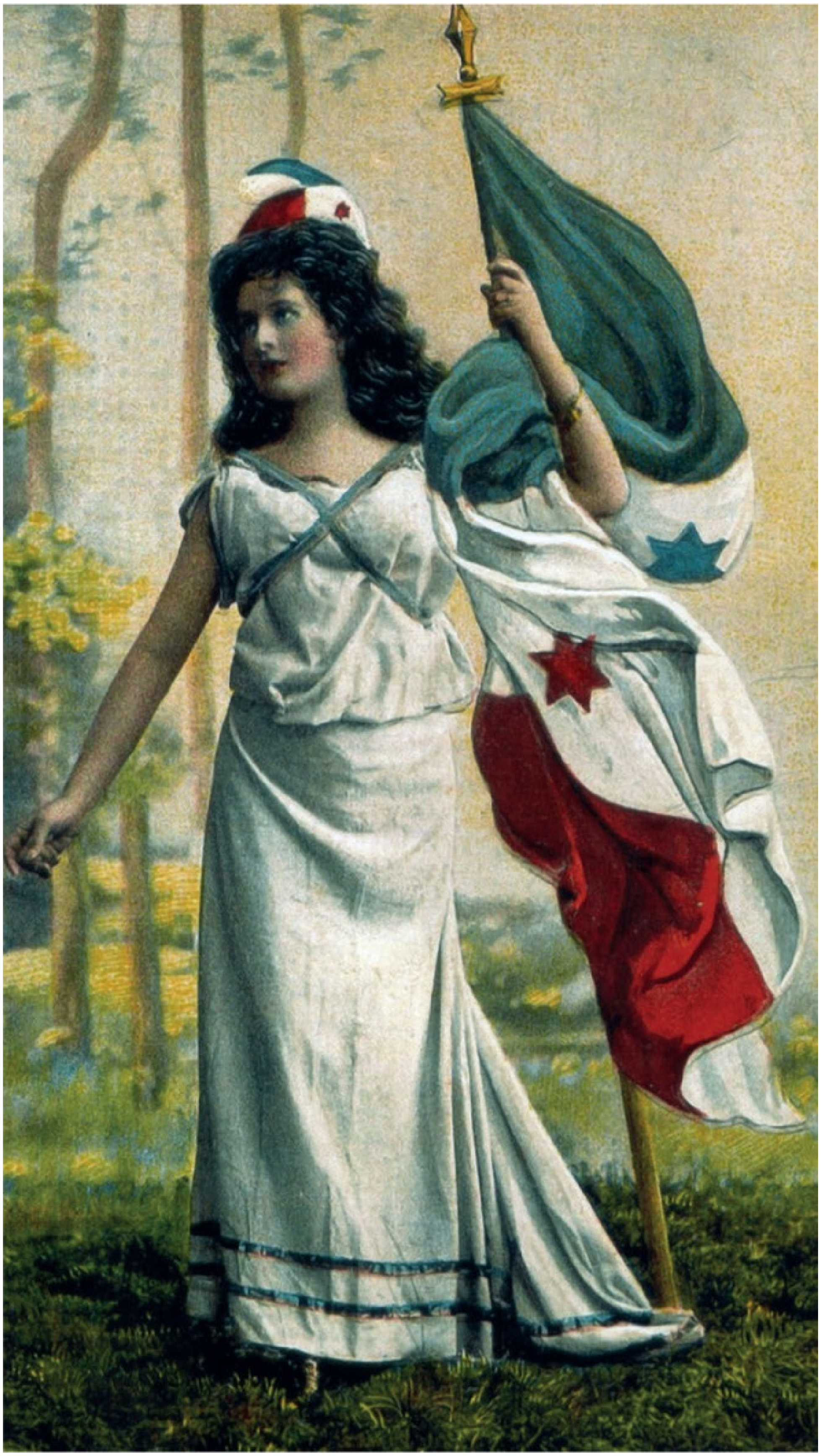


July '31 16

**This postcard dated July 31, 1903 is of a group of former Colombian troops who have been "persuaded" to fight for the new state of Panama and are stationed in the town of Colon. The caption to the photograph claims that some of the boy soldiers are as young as seven years old. Boy soldiers saw service with many Latin American armies in the early 20th century, and not in the drummer boy role they had in European armies. (Author's Collection)**

## The Independence of Panama 1903

The end of the civil war in Colombia in 1902 left the Conservative government weakened and unable to meet a new threat from the Central American department of Panama. Panama was part of Colombia, but it was on the Central American Isthmus, while the rest of the country was in South America. Panama had been earmarked, along with Nicaragua, as a possible site for the proposed canal which was to link the Caribbean with the Pacific Ocean. In 1901 the USA had secured the sole rights to build the canal and chose Panama as the preferred site. The US Government of President Theodore Roosevelt then began negotiations with the Colombian Government for the lease of land on which to build the canal. When these negotiations broke down in 1903, the local Panamanian authorities began preparing to make a unilateral declaration of independence. A Frenchman, Philippe Banau-Varilla, was one of the main organizers of the breakaway from Colombia. He later went on to negotiate the Canal Treaty, and single-handedly wrote the Panamanian Constitution. The rebels were supported in their declaration of independence by a ten-ship fleet of the US Navy in a classic example of gunboat diplomacy. It was common knowledge that, in their desire to begin building the strategically important canal, the USA had fomented the rebel breakaway from Colombia. The Colombian troops in Panama were expected to resist any breakaway by Panama but they were neutralized by Banau-Varilla, with the help of US funds. He raised a "Patriot Army," under the command of Colombian General Esteban Huertas, almost overnight by offering him and other commanders of the army garrison in Panama a bribe of $100,000. This bribe ensured the loyalty of any Colombian troops stationed in Panama, as well as any local Panamanian forces, to the breakaway movement. The infuriated Bogota government gathered Colombian forces on the Panama–Colombia border. Their only way to cross the isthmus to Panama City was via the American-owned railway, and its owners would not grant them permission to use it. In the Colombian capital, the government of President Jose Manuel Marroquin knew its position was weak. It only had a few hundred troops in Panama that it could rely on, and the army in general was still divided after the civil war, with the first loyalty of most units being to their commanding officer. With only a few old gunboats to counter the powerful US Fleet it had little chance of stopping the secession of Panama. On November 4, Panama declared its independence, and although the Colombian troops who had not been bribed tried to stop it, they were outnumbered. The two loyal Colombian officers and their 473 troops left Panama on a gunboat to return to Colombia. The Colombians had been given no choice in the matter and the USA could, and did, continue to claim that they had merely supported the Panamanians' right to self-determination. One of the first acts of the newly independent Panama was to sell the rights to the Canal Zone to the USA for $10 million. This gave the USA the right to treat the zone as an unincorporated territory of the USA, with a lease that ran from 1903 until 1979. They controlled a 5-mile strip of land either side of the canal for the whole of its length, and the first ship traversed it on January 7, 1914.



**A patriotic postcard from 1903 shows the new flag of Panama that emerged from the breakaway of that department from the rest of Colombia. It was supposed to have been designed using the colors of the two dominant political parties at the time, the Colorados or “Reds” and the Conservatives or “Blues.” The first flag was sewn by the wife of the first president, Manuel Amador Guerrero, and he smuggled it into Panama in time for the declaration of independence. (Author’s Collection)**

## The Acre War 1899–1903

Another Latin American conflict that began in the 19th century and ended in the 20th was the Acre War, which lasted, with intervals, from 1899 until 1903. The Acre region, in the north-east of Bolivia, was one of the world’s main sources of the new product of rubber in the late 19th century. This product was cultivated mainly by some 80,000 Brazilian immigrant workers who moved into Acre in the late 1800s. In 1899, Brazilian workers saw an opportunity to use the high price of rubber on the world market to finance a secessionist movement in Acre. The Acre region had been ceded to Bolivia by Brazil in 1867 and their government had no intention of returning it without a fight. In June 1899, a group of Brazilians took the Bolivian town of Puerto Alonso, which they renamed “Puerto Acre.” They then declared the independent Republic of Acre from their new capital and began to raise an army to defend it. A Spanish adventurer, Luis Galvez Rodriguez de Arias, was hired to raise this army and brought other Spaniards with him to act as the army’s core. Galvez and his men were all veterans of the recent Spanish–American War of 1898 and certainly knew how to fight. Even with only a few hundred men, the Acre Army was capable of defeating the small number of Bolivian troops in the region. In the Bolivian capital, La Paz, the minister of war, Colonel Ismael Montes, took it upon himself to raise an expeditionary force to fight in Acre. He put together a 500-strong force and they began to march towards distant Acre, moving through some of the world’s most impenetrable jungle. The horrendous conditions during their march meant that by the time they reached Acre few of the Bolivians were fit to fight. It was the Brazilians, however, who decided the fate of the First Republic of Acre, by sending a flotilla of river gunboats to crush the secessionist movement. The Brazilians were worried that the Bolivians might ask the USA to honor a long-forgotten agreement that pledged them to defend Bolivia from foreign aggression. When the flotilla arrived at Puerto Alonso on March 15, 1900, the Acre Republic was abolished and Galvez and his men were sent back to Spain. Only a few months later, however, in November 1900, a second Acre Republic was proclaimed under the leadership of Rodrigo Caraulho. This second secessionist movement raised a 500-strong army whose men were armed mainly with Winchester repeaters and the odd captured Bolivian Mauser. The army’s “heavy” weaponry was made up of an old light cannon and a single M1895 machine gun. They did, however, have a river steamer, the Solomoes, donated to them by the Brazilian governor of Amazonas State, which they armed with the cannon. This improvised gunboat was used to capture a Bolivian launch, the Alonzo, which they renamed the Rui Barbara. After recruiting a few more troops, the rebels attacked the Bolivian-held fort at Puerto Alonso but were beaten back, losing their precious cannon and machine gun in the process. When a Bolivian gunboat, the Rio Afua, arrived at Puerto Alonso, the rebels gave up their halfhearted rebellion on December 29, 1900.

**The Bolivian Army had been defeated by the Acre rebels between 1899 and 1903, who had the support of the Brazilian Army. In 1905 attempts were made to improve the state of the Bolivian Army by employing a five-strong French military mission. By the time the military mission left Bolivia in 1909 the army had grown to 4,300 men and officers with 5,000 new rifles and carbines, 16 Maxim machine guns, and light artillery like this Schneider mountain gun. (Cody Images)**

## The Second Campaign 1902–03

After the collapse of the second Republic of Acre in the final days of 1900, the Bolivians offered a compromise solution by which the Acre region would be leased to a private Bolivian company. The Brazilians did not accept this compromise solution, and neither did the Peruvian Government, which also thought it had a claim on Acre, and the territorial dispute rumbled on. In August 1902, a former Brazilian Army officer, Placido de Castro, organized a band of 35 supporters to launch a new rebellion. They traveled by canoe to the river town of Xapuri, captured it from the Bolivian garrison, and proclaimed a new Acre Republic. De Castro’s rebellion was challenged in mid-September, when a 180-strong Bolivian expeditionary force attacked Xapuri. The poorly armed rebels, who now had 70 men, were defeated and retreated into the jungle but their leader’s ambitions were far from over. Somehow de Castro was able to find the backing to raise a new 1,000-strong army armed with machetes and Winchester repeaters. De Castro proved himself adept at jungle warfare, even though he came from the open plains of southern Brazil. He was a natural leader, and before long he had expanded his forces to 1,400 and was laying siege to several Bolivian-held forts. His rebels took the fort at Vuelta de La Empressa with its 230-strong garrison on October 15, 1902, after a three-week siege.

### *The Siege of Puerto Alonso*

By January 1903, Placido de Castro and his 1,300 men were laying siege to the 194-strong Bolivian garrison at Puerto Alonso. The rebels were successful in capturing some of the outer defenses of the town, and they also captured the Bolivian gunboat Rio Afua, which they renamed Independencia. De Castro was content to try and starve the garrison out, but the Bolivians put up a hard fight, fearing execution if they surrendered. For nine days the rebels fired thousands of rounds into the beleaguered garrison, causing heavy casualties amongst the Bolivians. In total the rebels used 600,000 rounds of ammunition during the siege, and by January 24, the Bolivian commander, Colonel Rosondo Rojas, asked for terms. During the siege his men had suffered six dead and 15 wounded but the besiegers had suffered 200 dead, mainly from disease. Rojas bravely demanded from de Castro that the surviving Bolivians should be given full military honors, and the rebel commander gladly agreed. The Bolivian troops marched out of the fort and into the forbidding jungle but few lived through their ordeal to reach friendly lines. After his victory, de Castro was feeling confident and his forces were reported to have expanded to 2,000 men. To arm his forces, he arranged to sell 30 tons of good quality rubber, enabling him to buy some modern rifles for his men.

## Bolivia and Brazil at War

President Jose Manuel Pando of Bolivia, smarting from the defeats suffered by his troops in Acre, decided to take direct action. He organized a relief column of 700 troops in the Bolivian capital La Paz and personally led them in a march towards Acre. He was an experienced officer who had fought in the Acre region in earlier years and knew that a small force like his could tip the balance in the Bolivians’ favor. Pando was unaware that the defenders of Puerto Alonso, who his column was marching to relieve, were on the verge of surrendering. When the Bolivian column arrived at the city of Riberalta in the Acre region in March 1903, they found that the Acre forces were in the ascendancy. Pando divided his force in two, leaving half in Riberalta while the other half dug forward defensive positions at nearby Puerto Rico. These new Bolivian positions came under heavy attack from de Castro’s forces but the defenders successfully resisted them. The Brazilians, in response to the arrival of the Bolivians, had already mobilized a 4,000-strong army to go to Acre. They also threatened to increase their forces to 8,000 men, which would have given them at least a 10:1 advantage over the Bolivians. Castro and his irregulars were now sidelined as the Brazilian and Bolivian armies prepared to go to war. Bolivia now had the choice to send more troops to Acre from its weakened army or to seek a diplomatic solution. Pando's army, having suffered losses from disease already, was now down to only 450 men and he knew that further resistance was impossible. The pragmatic Bolivians chose diplomacy and a truce was agreed between the two countries on March 21. Lengthy talks between Bolivia and Brazil followed, ending with the signing of the Treaty of Petropolis on November 17, 1903. Under the treaty Bolivia ceded Acre (73,000 square miles of Bolivian territory) to Brazil. Bolivia was, however, compensated with a payment of £2,000,000 – a not-inconsequential sum for a piece of jungle in 1903. Acre losses during the fighting were estimated at 250 dead and 750 wounded, and the Bolivians claimed theirs as 50. Both sides certainly suffered many more deaths from tropical diseases, but the Bolivians were particularly vulnerable to these. Their troops came mainly from the Andes region of Bolivia and soon succumbed to the various tropical diseases they encountered in the jungle.

**Soldiers of the bodyguard unit of President Cipriano Castro of Venezuela parade outside his palace in Caracas in 1907 wearing archaic-looking uniforms. The shako hats worn by the other ranks belong to the previous century, while their officer’s kepi is a little more contemporary. Latin American armies spent most of their time in the early 20th century ensuring that their employer stayed in control of the country. (Library of Congress)**

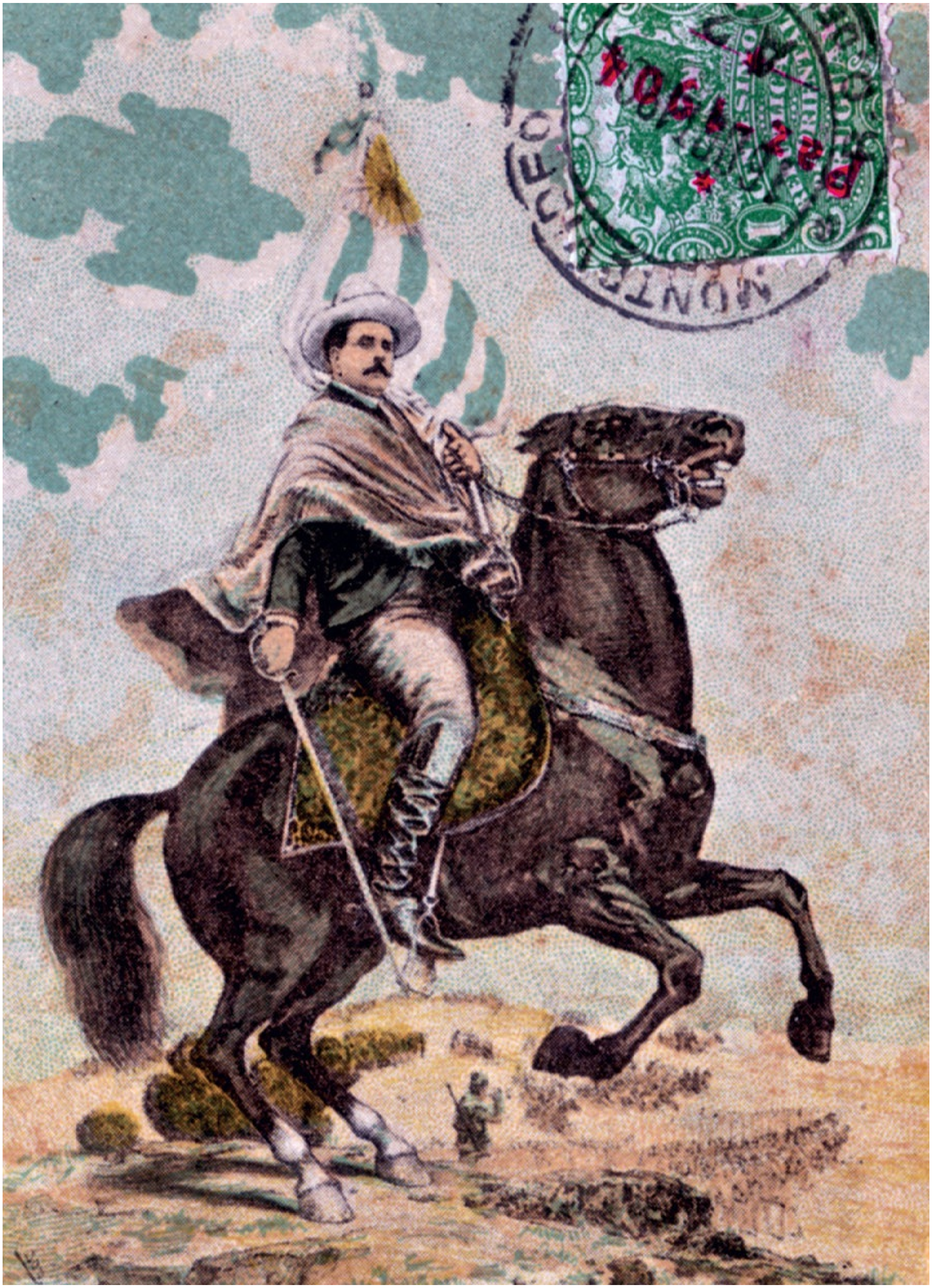
## Venezuela’s Liberative Revolution 1901–03

In December 1901, the Venezuelan General Manuel Matos rebelled against the brutal dictatorship of President Cipriano Castro. Castro had ruled the South American country since 1899 and any opposition to his regime was met with the most severe measures. Castro was supported by his loyal general, Juan Vincente Gomez, who was to command the government forces against Matos. The two armies fought a grueling 66-day campaign in western Venezuela with no quarter given. On October 12, 1902 the decisive battle of the war began at La Victoria and lasted nine days. The 6,000-strong government army defeated a rebel force of 14,000, with the total casualties reaching 3,000. Rebel troops retreated to their stronghold at Ciudad Bolivar on the Orinoco River, where they awaited the inevitable attack of Gomez’s army. In July 1903 a government army of 3,000 men was moved up the Orinoco on river steamers to attack the rebel stronghold. Although the defenders had a similar number of troops, they were outgunned by the attacking force. In a 50-hour battle the rebels were outfought by Gomez’s troops, who probably feared his wrath more than the enemy. Government losses totaled 250 killed and 400 wounded, while rebel losses were about 800 dead and wounded. Amongst the rebel weapons captured were 3,275 rifles, four artillery pieces, their solitary machine gun, and nearly 1 million rounds of ammunition. The defeated rebels were quickly rounded up and executed, with only a few managing to find sanctuary in their jungle hideouts. Gomez’s victory earned him the gratitude of President Castro, who he was to follow as the country’s leader in 1908. The general was to rule Venezuela until his death in the mid-1930s and was to prove to be one of the most brutal dictators that Latin America had ever seen. Medieval torture was the norm for political prisoners, and ordinary Venezuelans lived in constant fear of arrest for the slightest transgression.

**Uruguayan National Guardsmen supporting the incumbent Liberal Government parade for their officer during the 1904 civil war. They are fighting against the forces of the Conservative “Blanco” Party under the command of the legendary cavalry leader Aparicio Saravia. Although Saravia was a brilliant cavalry commander, his brave men could not defeat determined soldiers dug in behind machine guns. (Cody Images)**

## The Uruguayan Civil War 1904

Although Uruguay has been described as the “Switzerland of Latin America” due to its relatively peaceful history, it did see a vicious civil war in 1904. In the previous year the Liberal “Colorado” candidate had been elected to the presidency, much to the disgust of the Conservative “Blanco” Party. Blanco militants decided to demonstrate their opposition to the Liberal president, Jose Battle y Ordonez, with military force. The rebels’ military leader was a half-Brazilian “Gaucho,”* Aparicio Saravia, who gathered his elite cavalry into a 9,000-strong army. He was able to expand his force to 15,000 men, largely by the force of his personality, to confront the government army of 36,000. Although outnumbered, the Blanco rebels had the advantage that many of the Liberal troops were poorly trained and armed militia. The main problem for the rebels was that the Liberal troops had a small number of machine guns, which were to prove the decisive weapons in the coming fighting. Skirmishes between Saravia’s cavalry and the government troops occured throughout early 1904, before the decisive battles took place in the summer. Although the rebels could rely on Saravia’s Gaucho cavalry, the government forces had modern Mauser rifles and a few M1895 machine guns to counter them. During the first half of 1904, small-scale battles and skirmishes took place throughout Uruguay. One such skirmish took place in late January at Milo, with the rebels suffering 200 dead and 300 wounded, compared to 60 government soldiers killed. The first major battle in the civil war took place at Tupambae between June 22 and 24. It involved the 6,500-strong government Army of the North under the command of Colonel Pablo Galorza, which was faced by 5,000 Gaucho cavalry. The Gauchos recklessly attacked Galorza’s dug-in infantry, and many of Saravia’s men were mown down in front of the government machine guns, with total casualties reaching 2,300. A final battle took place a few months later at Masoller on September 1, 1904. The remnants of Saravia’s brave but outmatched cavalry faced the government Army of the South of 7,500 men. General Vasquez, the government commander, again used his machine guns to good effect, routing the Gaucho horsemen. It was estimated that 1,000 were killed and 4,000 were wounded, with one correspondent saying simply, “the slaughter was terrible.” Saravia was mortally wounded during the battle and his death effectively marked the collapse of the Blanco rebellion.



**General Aparicio Saravia, the 48-year-old Uruguayan cavalry commander and co-leader of the Blanco Party, was a larger-than-life character. He always led his elite Gaucho "Saravista" cavalry into battle from the front, and sustained several wounds during his 30-year military career. During the decisive battle of Masoller in September 1904, he was shot in the abdomen by a Mauser bullet. Taken across the border into Brazil by some of his men, he lay in agony in a farmhouse for ten days before dying of peritonitis. (Author's Collection)**

## Central American Wars 1900–11

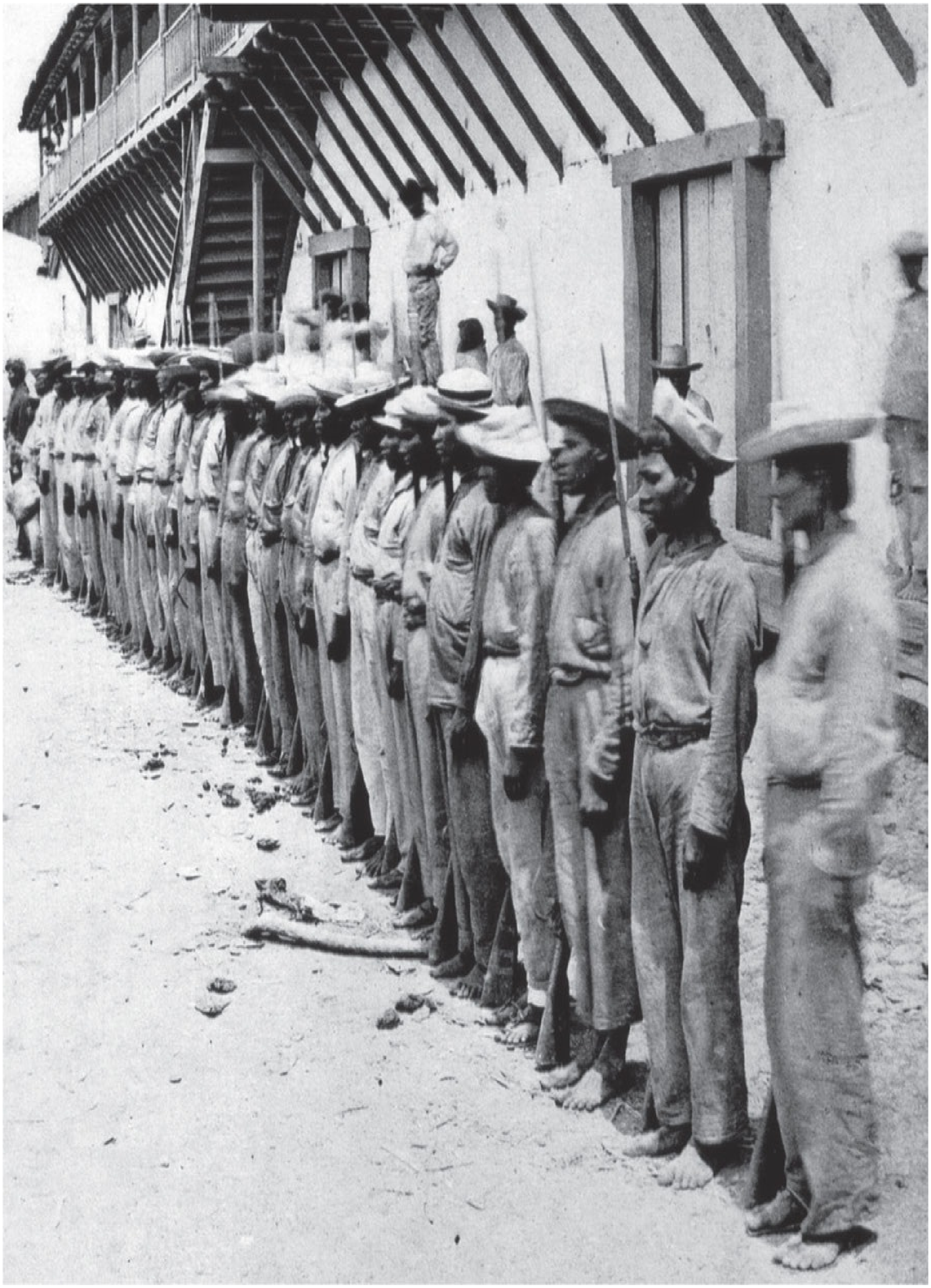
Central America in 1900 was the poorest region of Latin America and was made up of the smallest and least-populous nations. The region was divided into a group of small nations that continuously struggled to survive as separate entities. There had been several attempts during the 19th century to form a federation of three of these states – Nicaragua, Honduras, and El Salvador. In 1842 they were united, but this federation only lasted until 1845 and ended in war between Nicaragua and the two other nations. There was another, even shorter-lived federation in 1895 and any further attempts at unifying the three countries would be by military force. Most Central American countries were to go to war with their neighbors at least once during the first ten years of the 20th century.

## The Guatemala–El Salvador War 1906

During the early years of the 20th century, Central American states El Salvador and Honduras had been interfering in the politics of their neighbor Guatemala. Their support for rivals to the president of Guatemala, Estrada Cabrera, led in 1906 to conflict between two of the states, Guatemala and El Salvador. President Cabrera had ruled Guatemala since 1892 and, to counter his many enemies, had built up the Guatemalan Army to 15,000 men. In Central American terms this was a huge force, when his neighbors had armies of only 2,000–3,000 men. In late May 1906, political exiles had launched an abortive invasion of Guatemala from El Salvador, before the war proper began in July. This poorly organized invasion, led by Guatemalan General Manuel Barillas, was easily defeated in a battle at Ayutia on June 11. The rebels fled back across the border, leaving a large quantity of arms and ammunition behind them. Relations between the two nations now deteriorated, as President Cabrera accused the Salvadorians of supporting the rebel force.

**A cadet from the Guatemalan military academy goes through drill for the camera in 1904 wearing the smartest uniform available in this impoverished country. When he leaves the academy, he will be an officer in one of the largest armies in Central America. Most Central American armies were based around a small hard-core regular force reinforced in times of war by volunteers and militia. Two years later this cadet would probably be taking part in the war with El Salvador, which resulted in a Guatemalan victory. (Author's Collection)**

Matters came to a head when the El Salvadorian minister of war took it upon himself to start a war. Tomas Regalado had served as Salvadorian President between 1898 and 1903 and had retained his position at minister of war when he resigned. Regalado was a man embittered by the run in his political fortunes, and a renowned drunkard, whose notorious drunken binges usually resulted in trouble in the capital. On this occasion, Regalado, in a drunken attempt to re-establish himself in Salvadorian politics, acquired an artillery piece and fired a few rounds into the presidential palace, as his colleagues kept their heads down. Realizing he had gone too far this time, Regaldo made yet another desperate attempt to establish himself as a national hero by leading some of the El Salvadorian Army to the Guatemalan border to punish President Cabrera. His army crossed the border on July 9, led by a reportedly drunken Regalado, who had brought some Chilean military advisors with him. On July 13, as Regalado's troops advanced towards the Guatemalan capital, Guatemala City, he decided to scout ahead of the column. He rode towards Guatemalan lines, taking his adjutant and a small escort with him, when disaster struck. Regalado rode with his men into the middle of a unit of troops dressed in the dark blue of the El Salvadorian Army. Unfortunately, these were not friendly troops but were Guatemalans wearing similar dark-blue uniforms. He had seen Guatemalan troops earlier in the campaign wearing khaki, but these troops were reinforcements from the capital wearing smarter uniforms. Regalado and his men were quickly surrounded and set upon by the enraged Guatemalans. Although they fought bravely, all of the Salvadorians were killed and the invading army was now leaderless. The death of Regalado was followed by a short truce out of respect for his position of commander-in-chief. Surprisingly, the El Salvadorians did not retreat to the border but instead continued their advance. A decisive battle now took place at the town of El Jicaro, where two armies of several thousand men each clashed. The battle, of which little is known, ended in an El Salvadorian defeat and this setback persuaded their commanders to fall back to their border. As the Salvadorian troops withdrew, they were pursued by a strong Guatemalan army of 6,000–7,000 seeking revenge. The Guatamalans advanced into northern El Salvador, heading for the main Salvadorian force, which was recuperating after their campaign.



**Soldiers of the El Salvadorian Army stand outside their barracks at the time of their farcical war with Guatemala in 1906. The simple cotton uniforms, old muskets, and lack of equipment all indicate the poverty of Central American armies of the early 20th century. The officers in this unit wear the dark-blue dress uniform that often served as a field uniform as well. (Library of Congress)**

While this invasion was taking place, a truce was being arranged by the presidents of Guatemala and El Salvador. The El Salvadorian president, Pedro Jose Escalon, complained to the main peace broker, Mexican President Porfirio Diaz, accusing Guatemalan President Cabrera of using the peace talks to make a final attack on his forces. On July 17, a strong force of Guatemalans had indeed begun an attack on 2,000 Salvadorians camped at Metapan and Platanar. On the first day of the offensive, the Guatemalans, with several artillery pieces, struck the Salvadorian camp at Metapan and on the 18th attacked Platanar. Although outnumbered by the Guatemalans, the Salvadorians had a number of Chileans officers with them. One of these officers led a charge of Salvadorian cavalry that threw the Guatemalans back. The Guatemalan breach of the truce now incurred the wrath of the United States. President Theodore Roosevelt, enraged by the Guatemalan attacks, demanded that President Cabrera order his troops back across the border. He said that the “40,000-strong” Guatemalan Army was now a “menace to the peace” of Central America. By grossly exaggerating the size of the Guatemalan Army, Roosevelt was deliberately trying to create a Central American “bogeyman” to excuse the USA’s interference in the region. What President Roosevelt didn’t know, or chose to ignore, was that a small El Salvadorian army had crossed the border into southern Guatemala. It faced little opposition from the Guatemalans, whose main army was fighting in the north. Although peace negotiations had begun in the meantime, the Salvadorians hoped that this invasion would force the Guatemalans to withdraw some of their troops from El Salvador. Roosevelt was worried that the crisis could spill over into Mexico, which shared a border with Guatemala and had demanded that the two countries sign a truce.

The two parties met aboard the USS Marblehead and signed a peace treaty in the last days of July. The price paid for this “little” war was heavy, with El Salvador losing 700 killed and 1,400 wounded. Guatemala’s losses were reported to be much heavier, with 2,800 killed and 3,000 wounded. These were, proportionally, extremely heavy losses for such small nations and armies. Primitive medical facilities and the humidity of the region meant that significant numbers of the wounded also died as a result of complications like gangrene.

## The Campaign for Nicaragua 1907

Jose Santos Zelaya, the president of Nicaragua, had come to power in 1900 and held on to it with a combination of guile and brute force. He was supported by a 4,000-strong “active army,” but boasted that he could expand this to 40,000 if it became necessary. During 1906, Zelaya had begun to support a number of Honduran Liberals hoping to topple his regional rival, President Manuel Bonilla. The USA was growing increasingly unhappy with Zelaya and the way he was throwing his weight around with other Central American states. In readiness for the expected war with Honduras and his Liberal Nicaraguan enemies, Zelaya had recruited heavily to strengthen his army. By the end of January 1907, he had 12,000 men stationed on the northern border with Honduras and another 3,000 on the Costa Rican border. Fearing Zelaya’s next step, President Bonilla put together a regional anti-Zelaya military coalition. This was made up of the Honduran Army and the regular El Salvadorian Army, along with Nicaraguan Liberal rebels. In February Zelaya decided to launch a two-front campaign against Honduras, with a main army crossing their mutual frontier on the 21st. Heavy fighting took place in the border region, with Zelaya’s troops winning the main encounters and capturing the Honduran city of San Marcos from its 2,000 defenders. The defeated Honduran Army left behind 200 rifles, 10,000 rounds of ammunition, and a precious 75mm Krupp gun. At the same time, Zelaya sent a 600-strong invasion force in a few ships to make landings at various points along the Honduran coastline. These ports were an important source of revenue for Bonilla, and Zelaya was happy to bring his enemy to his knees by military or economic means. In response, Bonilla sent an army of 1,500 men southwards to link up with the 3,000-strong El Salvadorian Army under the command of General Jose Dolores Preza. Bonilla was determined to bring the Nicaraguan Army to battle, especially when he received news that several of his northern ports had fallen to their troops. The combined Honduran–El Salvadorian Army reached the town of Namasigue in the south-west of Honduras in early March. Zelaya had sent any troops he could spare to the region with the intention of destroying as many of the Allied force as possible, to prevent an invasion of northern Nicaragua.

**Wars in Central America in the first decade of the 20th century saw various presidents, dictators, and rebellious generals employ foreign military experts. Most of these experts were US veterans of the Spanish–American War of 1898 and the USA's campaign in the Philippines between 1899 and 1903. These often larger-than-life characters had little to lose, and in many cases much to gain, from seeking employment with the armies of Honduras, Nicaragua, and El Salvador. The most famous of these military adventurers was Lee Christmas, a Louisiana-born engineer and train driver, who through chance found military service with a number of Central American armies between the late 1890s and 1913. His train was captured by rebels in Honduras in 1897 and he decided to join them, fighting with them for two years. Switching sides several times, by 1902 he had gained the rank of colonel in the Honduran Army. In 1903 he became an ally of General Bonilla. Christmas stuck loyally to Bonilla's side during a series of military campaigns between 1903 and 1913. During those years Bonilla lost power and fought several campaigns before regaining the presidency of Honduras. When Bonilla died in 1913, Christmas retired after spending almost 20 years fighting in the jungles of Central America, dying of tuberculosis in 1924. During his long military career in Central America, Christmas had fought alongside a number of American machine gunners. In the early days of machine guns, the acquisition of a few of them handled by expert gunners could decide the outcome of a battle or skirmish. Men like Tracy Richardson, Guy "Machine Gun" Molony, Sam Dreben, and Emil Holmdahl were employed by Central American armies purely for their skill with this type of weapon. Often, the fact that they could simply keep a machine gun operational in the humid conditions of the jungle was enough to earn them good pay. Although these "soldiers of fortune" often fought alone or in small units, there were sometimes several hundred, mostly American mercenaries in a Central American army of a few thousand. There were of course some Europeans who fought in the Central American wars between 1900 and 1913. Some of these adventurers volunteered to fight for the British or, in the case of Tracy Richardson, the Canadian Army during World War I. By the time the USA entered the war in 1917, many of these men were too worn out by years of service in the jungles of Central**

**America to serve their country. Others were lying in shallow jungle graves, having failed to persuade their captors that they should be allowed to change sides and serve a new master. Perhaps the most lucrative employment for foreigners in Central America during the 1920s and early 1930s was as military pilots. The shortage of trained indigenous pilots meant that Central American generals were forced to employ foreigners to fly their handful of combat aircraft. By the early 1930s, however, even this source of work had dried up. Most Central American air forces had, by this time, enough trained pilots of their own. They could then refuse to pay the exorbitant wages often demanded by these "flying soldiers of fortune."**

# RAILROAD STORIES

MAY

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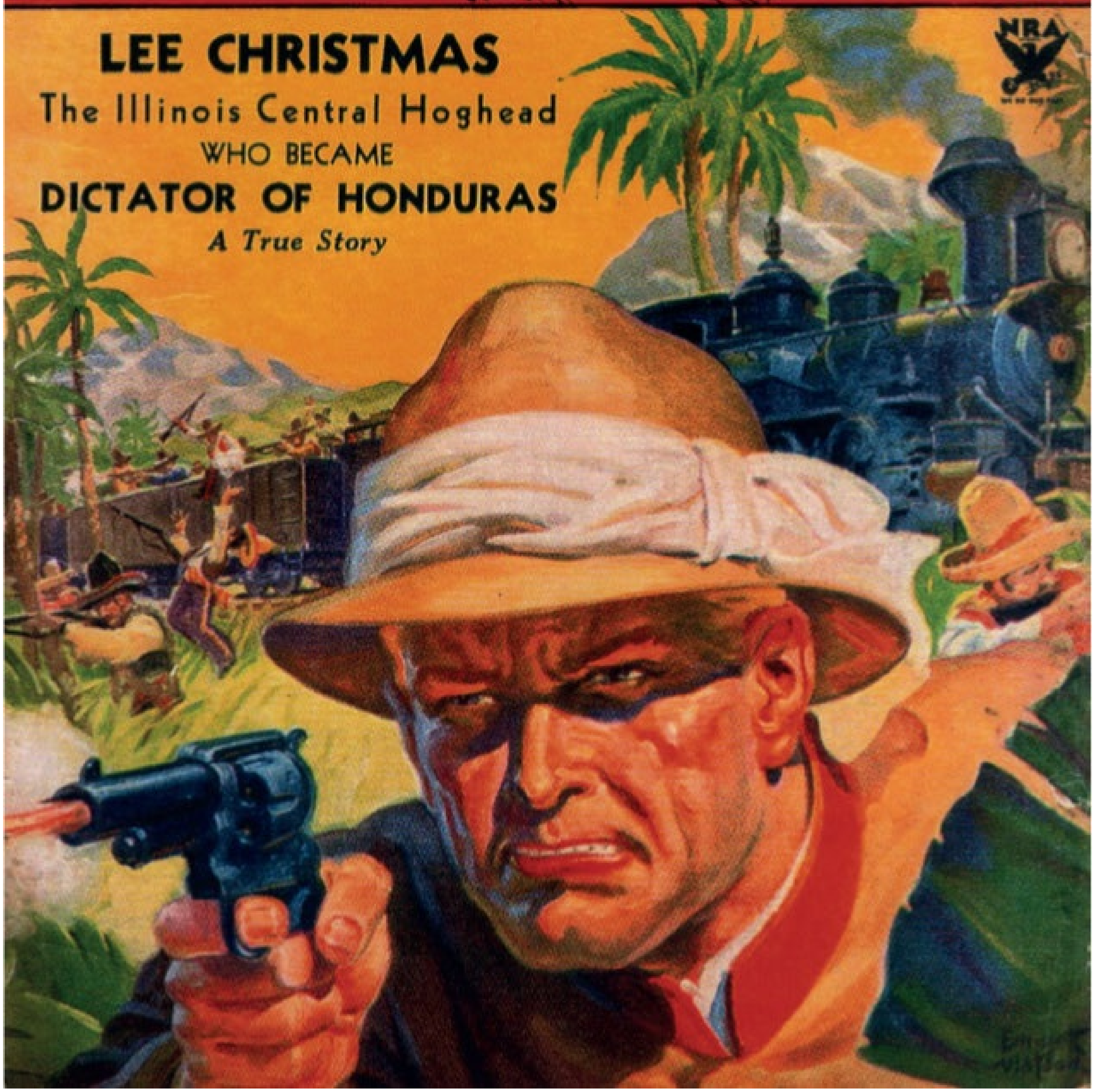


**LEE CHRISTMAS**

The Illinois Central Hoghead

WHO BECAME

**DICTATOR OF HONDURAS**

*A True Story*

NRA
Emmett Watson

**This cover from the 1930s boys’ own adventure magazine Railroad Stories shows an idealized vision of Lee Christmas, the American military adventurer. Beginning his career as a train driver in the early 1900s, Christmas was to fight for several Central American armies between the late 1800s and the 1920s. Christmas was the epitome of the larger-than-life characters who fought for various Central American armies during the Banana Wars of the early 20th century. (Cody Images)**

## The Battle of Namasigue, March 1907

On March 17, 1907, the two armies fought the decisive battle of the war at Namasigue. The battle saw a large Allied force of 5,000 defeated by a Nicaraguan Government force of only 1,500. Although the Nicaraguans were heavily outnumbered, President Zelaya had made sure that they were not outgunned. They had a number of 42mm Hotchkiss M1875 light guns and several Hotchkiss 1-pdr. revolving cannon, which was like an enlarged Gatling gun. This gun could fire 68 rounds per minute from its five barrels and proved devastating against the tightly packed Allied infantry columns. In addition, many of Zelaya’s men were armed with modern Mauser rifles, while the Allied troops mostly had out-of-date Remington rolling block rifles. The fighting began with a steady artillery bombardment by the Nicaraguans that lasted for 11 hours. This resumed at 5.00am on the 18th, and the Honduran and El Salvadorian commanders decided to do exactly what the Nicaraguans wanted. Attacking in tightly packed columns across open ground, the Allied troops were devastated by the well-sited Nicaraguan artillery and machine guns. During the three-day battle, the Allied armies made a series of suicidal attacks against the well-dug-in Nicaraguans. When they came up against the Maxim guns of the defenders, it was sheer carnage, and the attacking troops had nowhere to hide. The machine guns had been well sited by American mercenaries to create killing zones, which meant that few escaped from their bullets. On the 19th, the last day of the battle, the Allies suffered 1,000 casualties and 40 percent of the surviving Honduran troops went over to the Nicaraguans. This resulted in their El Salvadorian former allies suffering even heavier casualties, including every single cadet from the military academy. The total casualties of the battle were estimated at 3,000, with most of the wounded dying in the jungle without medical care. Nicaraguan losses were reported to be 80 dead and 200 wounded and Zelaya had won a resounding, but horrific, victory. Namisigue has the distinction of being the bloodiest battle in history in terms of the proportion of dead to the number of soldiers involved. Zelaya surveyed the battlefield after his army’s victory and later said, “The number of dead that they left on the field was so great that we were unable to bury them all.”

**In this photograph dated 1902, a lineup of Nicaraguan soldiers are on parade minus their rifles. The Nicaraguan Army of this period, like all other Central American states in the early 20th century, had little armament besides rifles or muskets. Over the next decade soldiers like these would fight in a series of local revolutions, civil wars, and border wars. The wars would be fought at close quarters between equally poorly armed and often ragged soldiers. (US National Archives)**

## Bonilla’s Defeat

The Honduran president, Bonilla, received news of his army’s destruction at his temporary HQ in a farmhouse a few miles from the battlefield. He refused to surrender, however, and moved further south with the remainder of his troops, where he managed to gather a force of 500 demoralized men. Zelaya’s forces followed hard on the heels of Bonilla’s army and prepared to lay siege to their positions. The Honduran president realized he was finished and managed to get to the coast and board the USS Chicago at the port of Amapala. Once on board the US Navy ship, he issued a statement surrendering his army before sailing off into exile. Meanwhile, the victorious Nicaraguans advanced north-westwards through Honduras to the capital at Tegulcigalpa, which they entered on March 28, effectively ending the war.

## The Nicaraguan Civil War 1909–10

In the autumn of 1909, the government of Nicaraguan President Zelaya was under serious threat from a rebellion by General Estrada. Estrada had set up his headquarters at the port of Bluefields in north-eastern Nicaragua on October 10. Zelaya realized that he must launch a military campaign into the north-eastern region before Estrada could increase his strength. The rebels were joined by several hundred US volunteers from New Orleans, who saw an opportunity to earn some easy money. Estrada meanwhile had gathered a force of 500 men at Rama on the Escondido River and waited for the advance of the government army. At Boca San Carlos, 1,000 of Zelaya’s troops clashed with rebels commanded by Emiliano Chamorro. Although details of the battle are sketchy, the government army was defeated, losing 100 men killed with another 300 captured. A major boost for the rebel army was the capture of 400 rifles and two Krupp “siege” guns, which allowed Estrada to expand his forces to 1,500 men. In the Nicaraguan capital, Managua, President Zelaya tightened his grip on power and introduced martial law. He insisted on keeping his main military force in Managua, not wanting to risk them in a campaign against the rebels in central and eastern Nicaragua. In December 1909, President Zelaya reportedly had a total of 5,000 “well-armed and drilled” troops. He had employed a number of German and Italian soldiers of fortune to train his artillery, which consisted mainly of 65mm mountain guns. He also had at least one US “expert” machine gunner in his service, John B. Moissant. His troops, however, were scattered across a number of garrisons and the loyalty of many was questionable. The rebels claimed that Zelaya would need all of his 5,000 men to dislodge them from their bases, which were now 25 miles from Lake Managua. The Nicaraguan capital was on the southern shore of the lake, so it was obvious to Zelaya that if he were to save his government, the time to act was now. He dispatched an army southward, which crossed the Costa Rican border in order to outflank Chamorro’s rebel army. Other rebel forces were fortifying the town of Rama, and this army was seen as the most immediate threat to Zelaya.

## The Battle of Rama

In a desperate bid to defeat the growing rebel armies of General Estrada, President Zelaya sent a government army of 3,500 to attack their main force. This rebel army, under the command of Estrada’s deputy, General Luis Mena, was positioned at the town of Rama. The plan of the pro-Zelaya commander, General Jose Esteban Gonzalez, was for his attack on Mena’s positions to force General Estrada to leave his Bluefield base 35 miles away to come to his subordinate’s aid. Gonzalez’s troops dug in at the village of Recreo close to Rama and waited for the rebels to attack, which they did on December 19, 1909. The rebels decided to take 700 men up river in a flotilla of old river boats to outflank the Zelayista army. Gonzalez had 3,500 men, well armed with Mauser and Remington rifles, ready to fight, supported by four field guns and four Maxim machine guns. The government troops had been issued with a rifle and a few rounds of ammunition each, as well as a red blanket worn over the shoulder to distinguish themselves from the rebels, who had blue blankets. Both armies had to provide their own clothes and shoes and many troops went into battle barefoot. Gonzalez had the advantage that a number of officers on his staff were veterans of the 1907 campaign. Mena, however, had the services of several US soldiers of fortune, who operated his handful of machine guns. The battle began at 1.00pm with a rebel attack on the two Zelayista fortifications at Tatumbla and Jalteva. These rebel attacks were intended to keep the Zelayista troops busy until the main rebel force arrived to outflank them. The next morning, the rebel army disembarked from their boats with several field pieces including a 3in. Hotchkiss gun and deployed at Recreo, across the River Mico from Gonzalez's army. At 12.00am on the 20th, the rebels began to attack both flanks of the government troops' positions and Zelaya's men panicked. They managed to pull themselves together sufficiently to launch one desperate charge against the rebel trenches, but this was thrown back. Behind them the rebels took Tatumbla and, despite outnumbering their enemies by some 500 men, the Zelayistas were virtually surrounded. By dusk the battle was over at Rama and Zelaya's men surrendered, while fighting for their other fortification at Jalteva continued. Jalteva was held by a US mercenary, Godfrey Fowler, who was facing his own countrymen fighting for Mena. When Jalteva fell and the battle ended, there were 900 casualties, including 400 dead, from combined force of about 4,000 troops actually engaged. At his headquarters in Bluefields, Estrada received the news of his victory calmly and according to reports sat smoking his cigar contentedly. He was also cheered by the large amount of materiel captured, with three Hotchkiss guns, four Maxim machine guns, 2,000 rifles and 1 million rounds of ammunition taken. As Estrada had barely enough food for his own men, 2,000 defeated Zelayista troops were moved by boat to Bluefields, where they were fed by the Red Cross. Hearing of the defeat at Rama, President Zelaya sent a message to US President William Taft announcing his resignation. On December 28, 1909, Zelaya left Managua with a small bodyguard of 50 men and a Maxim machine gun, sailing into exile on a Mexican gunboat.

**This statue situated in the center of the Nicaraguan capital Managua celebrates a national hero from the 1907 war with Honduras. It features a 14-year-old boy called Ramon Montoya who readily volunteered to fight against the invading Hondurans. He is quoted as saying, “I’m going to war because I do not want to be told stories and Nicaragua needs me.” According to the records he was killed exhorting his older comrades to go forward during the crucial battle of Namasigue later in the war. (Author’s Collection)**

# 1910

The removal of Zelaya did not end the civil war, as he had handed over his office to his vice-president, Jose Madriz. Madriz offered peace to the victorious Estrada but the rebel leader rejected the offer as he was expecting official recognition from the US Government. In early March the rebels suffered a setback when rebel General Emiliano Chamorro was defeated by a government force, losing 800 troops. In late March, 2,000 government troops, under the personal command of General Madriz, advanced towards Estrada’s base at Bluefields. Estrada’s rebels fortified the port and called in small detachments from outlying positions to strengthen the garrison. The two armies now faced each other, but neither felt capable of delivering a blow and both waited for reinforcements. By May, Madriz’s army, camped eight miles from the rebel base at Bluefields, had been reinforced by 500 Honduran troops. Madriz had tried to buy arms and hire foreign experts to strengthen his army using the dwindling treasury. Most of the available American soldiers of fortune were already in service with Estrada’s army. In the rebel garrison, the defenders had been offered 125 acres of land each if they could defeat the gathering government forces. A rebel victory on June 3 was one of a series of mostly inconclusive battles all over Nicaragua that month. Commanded by Estrada himself, the rebels won this victory over government forces under the command of General Lara. In late June, press reports said that Estrada’s troops were only a day’s march from Managua, but this proved to be a false dawn and fighting continued. Early July saw rebel troops under General Mais win a victory over a larger government force under General Matuty, routing them in a 20-minute battle. Momentum remained with the rebels through July, when one of Estrada’s commanders won a major battle against Madriz’s army in a fierce ten-hour encounter. In another victory, the rebels captured 190 rifles and a large number of horses and mules, a scarce resource. Several hundred prisoners were also taken during this battle, some now choosing to fight for Estrada. Further arms arrived for the rebel cause in August to supplement those captured and Estrada now felt strong enough to advance on Managua. At the head of his army was a large number of American mercenaries operating the army’s machine guns and artillery. On August 27 in Managua, President Madriz bowed to the inevitable, abandoning his capital and following his predecessor into exile. Within a few days, the rebels entered Managua and General Estrada was able to claim the presidency.

## The Honduran Civil War 1911

In December 1910, the deposed Honduran president, Manuel Bonilla, who had been defeated in 1907, met with several conspirators in New Orleans. These included two military adventurers, Bonilla’s old comrade Lee Christmas and George “Machine Gun” Molony. Molony was a notorious character who had been involved in a number of adventures, both legal and illegal. They agreed, with the support of wealthy banana planter Sam Zemurray, to go back to Honduras and overthrow the government of President Miguel Davila. Davila had been a political ally of President Zelaya of Nicaragua, now in exile, and an enemy of Bonilla and President Cabrera of Guatamala. Christmas and Molony immediately began recruiting soldiers of fortune from the bars and casinos of New Orleans. The revolutionary army would be transported to Honduras in an old surplus US Navy ship, the Hornet, which Zemurray had purchased for them. With a few cases of rifles and some US Army surplus M1895 machine guns aboard, the ship sailed for the northern coast of Honduras on the night of December 23. Molony’s cherished Hotchkiss machine gun was also on board, which was soon to be put to good use.US officials estimated that some 70 Hondurans had joined the invasion force aboard the Hornet but they were confident that more could be recruited once they landed. Their ship landed at a small island off the coast of Honduras whose weak garrison soon surrendered. After taking another Honduran island, and making the garrison commander there run around in circles shouting “Viva Bonilla,” they landed at the port of Trujillo.

Although US ships in the region had moved to intercept the Hornet, it soon became apparent that their government would not be averse to the overthrow of President Davila. He was considered too liberal by the US Government and it was thought that he might renege on debts owed to American banks. With the rebel army safely ashore, they began to advance towards the main port in Honduras, La Ceiba. They took the town of Ironia and, according to the press, the sound of “booming guns” could be heard in the Honduran capital Tegucigalpa. This caused widespread panic in the city and many businesses closed down, expecting the impending arrival of the rebel army. Davila’s government tried to respond to the rebel threat by launching a recruiting drive to expand the army. It was estimated, however, that only 50 percent of the troops who joined the Honduran Army could be counted on. The other 50 percent were fully expected to desert to Bonilla’s forces at the earliest opportunity. In any case, as one commentator had said a few months before, the Honduran “treasury was empty, and the army was without arms, munitions or uniforms.” Meanwhile, in La Ceiba, the US Navy gave some vital help to Bonilla and his military commander Lee Christmas. They had landed a force of sailors in the port in order to protect US residents there and were joined by sailors from the Royal Navy. Captain George Cooper of the US Navy then informed the commander of the Honduran Government troops in La Ceiba that the port was now a “neutral zone.” The commander, General Francisco “Chico” Guerrero, was given little choice but to abandon his positions in the port and instead prepare to attack the advancing rebel army.

## The Battle of La Ceiba

Rebel forces reached the outskirts of La Ceiba on January 25 and the fighting began almost immediately. The number of troops involved in the battle is usually given as 500–700 on each side, but this is probably an underestimation. Although the battle was numerically a relatively small affair, it proved decisive in the Bonilla–Davila struggle for power. Rebel forces were commanded by Lee Christmas, who had his two expert American machine gunners with him. “Machine Gun” Molony had been joined by another US soldier of fortune, Joe Reed, and together with Christmas they almost won the battle by themselves. Christmas knew La Ceiba and the region around it well and had planned the battle in advance, intending to use his superiority in machine guns to full advantage. At the start of the battle Molony charged up the beach, which formed one flank of the battlefield, with his beloved Hotchkiss machine gun. He rushed the main government artillery position and managed to capture their only Krupp light gun. Christmas and Reed had meanwhile sited their M1895s to create killing zones, into which they hoped the government troops would advance. The government commander, Francisco Guerrero, had been hamstrung by the actions of the US Navy and decided to attack the well dug-in rebels. He could at least rely on the loyalty of the commander of what remained of his artillery, his son Lieutenant Michael Guerrero. When the battle began in earnest General Francisco Guerrero duly obliged Christmas by sending 300 of his men into his prepared killing zone, where they died in large numbers. General Guerrero now attempted to make up for his poor planning with sheer courage, riding into the thick of the battle in an attempt to rally his devastated troops. He drove 12 of his men, who had abandoned their posts, back to the battle at the point of his revolver. When they got close to the fighting, Guerrero realized he was in front of the main rebel positions. His men now turned their guns muzzle down, as a sign of their willingness to surrender, but Guerrero refused and rode towards the enemy. His men hit the dirt and their commander was immediately hit in the back by the deadly crossfire. Guerrero tried to get back to his own lines but was now the lone target for a number of rebel rifles and was hit several more times before falling dead from his horse. The government troops now retreated in disorder from the battlefield, leaving behind an estimated 600 dead as well as five machine guns and two old-fashioned Gatling guns. To compound their guilt in effectively expelling Guerrero from La Ceiba by declaring the port a “neutral zone,” the US Navy now handed over to the rebels a number of pro-Davila politicians who had taken shelter there. President Davila knew that the defeats suffered by his army, especially at La Ceiba, made his position untenable. He called the US minister in Honduras to his office and said he was ready to hand over the presidency to any person designated by the United States. He said he would demonstrate his good faith by putting the agreement to the vote of the Honduran National Assembly. Unsurprisingly, the Honduran politicians were unhappy with the conditions of the agreement and duly voted it down. President Davila’s administration was now dealt a deathblow by the USA, which refused to agree to loan any more money to his administration if it was to be used to continue to fight the rebels. These impossible conditions left Davila unable to use his army to defend the capital. Davila resigned his presidency and a series of meetings now took place between Lee Christmas and US officials aboard the USS Marietta. Under the terms of the agreement reached by “kingmaker” Christmas and the officials, a provisional president would be appointed until elections could be held. In February 1912, Bonilla was re-elected as Honduran president, an office he held until his sudden death in 1913.

**General Lee Christmas, the US-born Central American adventurer and mercenary, was certainly a larger-than-life character. He is seen here in the dress uniform of a general of the Honduran Army in 1905, which was ordered for him from Paris. He often went to war in command of thousands of men, with his largest command having 14,000 troops. In contrast he was also in command of armies of a few hundred men, especially in his early career. He was credited with creating seven presidents and overthrowing five governments, and served as a general in five Central American armies. (Library of Congress)**

## The Dominican Republic Civil War 1911–12

The civil war fought in the Caribbean state of the Dominican Republic between December 1911 and November 1912 was a little known but bloody affair. It is sometimes known as the War of the Quiquises after the nickname given to the rebels. On November 19, 1911, General Luis Tejera led a group of military plotters in an attack on the carriage of President Ramon Cacares. The president was killed and the general was wounded in the leg during the shoot-out with his bodyguards. Tejera and his assassins fled the scene in a car but crashed into a river. After dragging their leader from the water, the men abandoned him to his fate while they escaped. Shortly afterwards, the unfortunate general was found by soldiers loyal to the assassinated president and immediately executed. In the ensuing power vacuum, General Alfredo Victoria, commander of the army, seized control and forced the Congress to elect his uncle, Eladio Victoria, as the new president. He was widely suspected of having bribed members of the Congress but his uncle took office nonetheless on February 27, 1912. Opposition to the new president soon emerged in the person of the former president, Horacio Vasquez, who returned from exile with a small force of armed supporters. Vasquez and his “Horacist” troops made contact with another opponent of the new regime, the border Caudillo, or commander, General Desidero Arias. They combined their small forces and began a military campaign against the Victoria regime and its forces. By December, the country was in a state of war, with both armies, each of fewer than 1,000 men, laying waste to the countryside. The violence prompted the USA to abandon the customs houses it operated on the Haitian border, despite the fact that they had not been targeted. A small US force, which had responsibility for monitoring the frontier and combating smuggling, withdrew, handing over responsibility to the Dominican Army. Men and weapons passed freely across the Haitian–Dominican Republic border as the Haitian Government sought to promote instability in its neighbor. These two countries, which shared the Caribbean island of Hispaniola, were constantly in dispute and seeking ways to undermine each other. The Dominican Army had a small but well-armed force of about 500 men in the field and was expected to put down the rebellion on the north-western border. Aid given to the rebels by the Haitian Government was causing them some problems, however. General Arias' forces seized the customs houses and extorted loans from the peasants and plantation owners in the districts they controlled. Meanwhile, corrupt officers within the Dominican Army commonly pocketed the pay of their troops and plundered the villages and towns they were sent to subdue. The anarchy created by both rebel and government forces was exploited by officers of both sides to enrich themselves. It was widely suspected that the war was being prolonged by both sides to allow this corruption to continue. In late September, US President William Taft sent a commission to seek a peaceful resolution in the Dominican Republic. He did not seek permission from the Dominican Government, however, merely informing them that the commission's members would arrive on October 2. The commission was frustrated by the lack of cooperation from the two factions and, on November 13, reported back to the US that neither side wanted peace and were content to continue the fighting for their own selfish reasons. In an attempt to force the government to make peace with the rebels, the USA reduced the amount of money passed on from customs revenues they collected on the government's behalf. They also threatened to recognize the rebels and pass all customs revenues to them, unless President Victoria resigned. With typical gunboat diplomacy, a US Navy force arrived in the Dominican Republic, accompanied by 750 US Marines, to enforce US policies. President Victoria duly resigned and a provisional government took office on November 30, 1912 under an interim president, Archbishop Alejandro Nouel. Nouel was unable to organize a successor to his office, so the Congress took control and appointed Senator Jose Bordas Valdez to take over. His brief term as president of the Dominican Republic lasted from April 1913 until August 1914.

# Peru’s Border Problems 1910–11

During the first decade of the 20th century a series of long-running border disputes brought four Latin American countries to the brink of war. Peru had been at the center of the border disputes of the late 19th century, along with its southern neighbor Chile. Chile had influence over several other South American nations, notably Ecuador and Bolivia, and between 1909 and 1911 had used its influence over these weaker neighbors in attempts to drive them into proxy wars with Peru. In 1909, the Chilean leadership had goaded the Bolivians to declare war on Peru over their mutual border. The Bolivians had few illusions about the outcome of such a one-sided war with the more powerful Peruvians and resisted Chile’s political maneuvering.

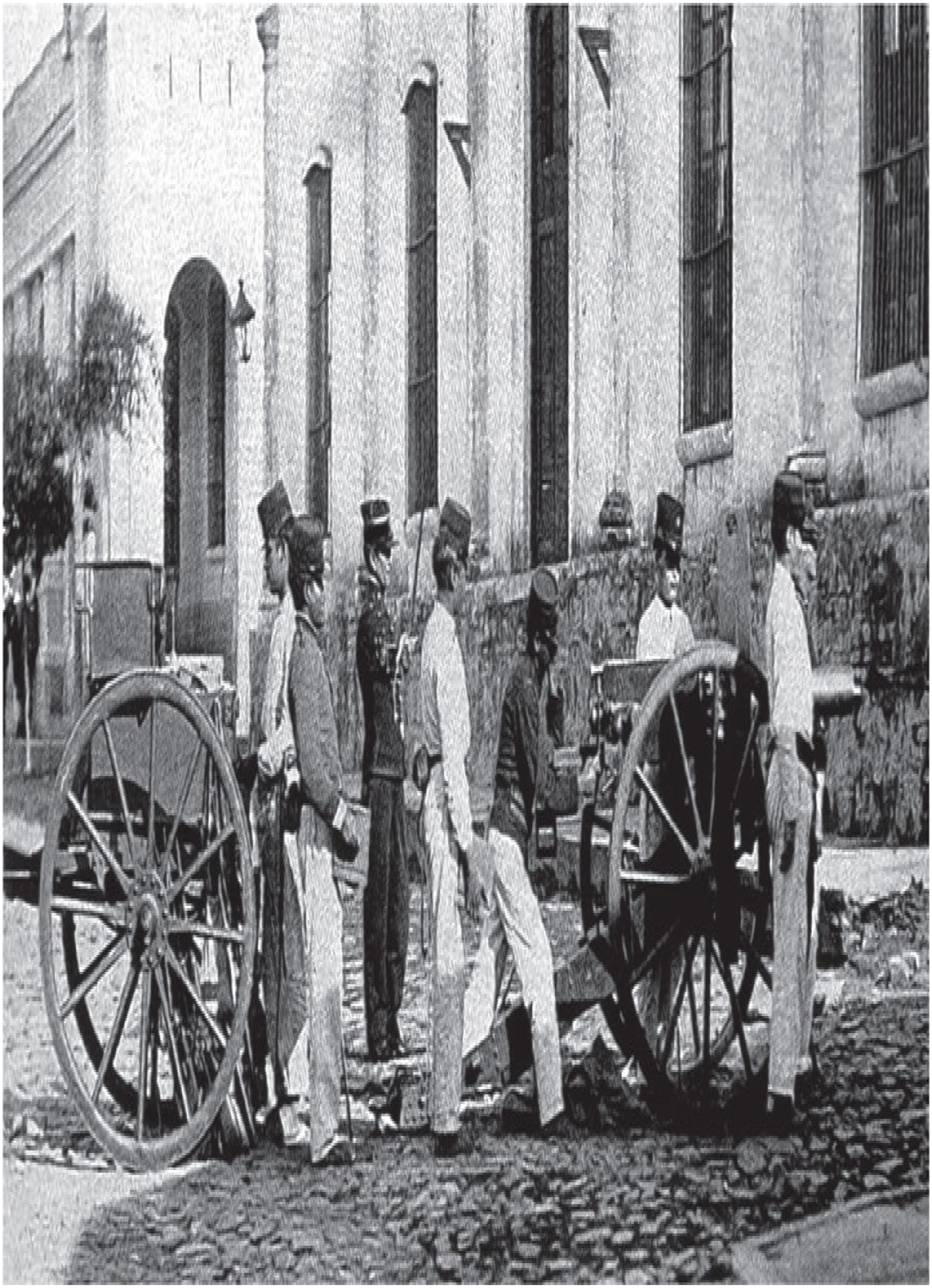
The following year, a long-standing border dispute between Peru and Ecuador brought both countries to the brink of war. Beginning in early 1910, a standoff developed along the line of the Zarumilla River on their mutual border. Ecuador, under its saber-rattling president, Eloy Alfaro, hoped to have the support of its more powerful ally, Chile, in any future conflict with Peru. Alfaro had a “paper” army of 5,140 men, but in reality, it numbered no more than 3,800 men, the result of Ecuadorian officers padding the rolls with non-existent troops to pocket their phantom soldiers’ pay. The soldiers that did exist were poorly trained and they were armed with decrepit rifles that had been supplied by Chile in 1907. Alfaro, fully expecting war with Peru, tried to expand his army to 20,000 men – a figure that was totally unrealistic for Ecuador to maintain. Any resulting force would be a rabble, with few officers and not enough rifles, which would have to face the well-armed, 30,000-strong Peruvian Army. The Ecuadorians did at least receive 5,000 new Mauser rifles, and on the brink of the expected war, Chile sent 15,000 more, which arrived on March 12 to replace those useless rifles previously supplied by them. Despite the hopes of President Alfaro, however, Chile did not agree to form a formal military alliance with Ecuador against Peru. Alfaro turned to another regional power, Colombia, signing a military alliance on March 10. Peru now made it quite clear that, if the alliance was ratified, it would lead to war with Colombia and the latter backed down, leaving Ecuador alone. With no support from their allies, Ecuador’s bellicose tone changed and a border war was averted. Neither Ecuador or Peru had forgotten their territorial claims and the region was to see further conflict 31 years later (see Chapter 9).

**Two privates of the Peruvian 23rd Regiment have their photograph taken in a Lima photo studio in 1910. Peru was involved at the time in a border dispute with Ecuador and was also at odds with the Bolivian, Colombian, and Chilean governments. The 30,000-strong Peruvian Army was well prepared to use force against the smaller armies of the Ecuadorian and Colombian governments if necessary. Like most Latin American countries, Peru was unhappy with its borders, which had been drawn up by the Spanish authorities pre-Independence. (Author’s Collection)**

Although war had been averted in 1910, another dispute in July 1911 drew Peru into conflict with Colombia. On this occasion, the war was decided in a single battle for the port of Pedrera on the Caqueta River, a tributary of the Amazon. Peru’s attempts to extend its territory in the Amazon region made this strategic Colombian river port a target. Pedrera was garrisoned by 100 Colombian military policemen, whose heaviest armament were Mauser rifles. These hastily deployed troops were under the command of General Jisias Gamboa, who had the services of several Chilean military advisors. The first Peruvian force to reach Pedrera was the 250-strong 9th Battalion, which had two small cannon and four heavy machine guns. Meanwhile the garrison had been reinforced by 80 men, bringing its strength up to almost 200 men. What fighting there was between the two small armies proved indecisive and more men were dying from disease than from combat. To bring matters to a head, the Peruvian command, at their base at Iquitos, gathered a river flotilla to send against the Colombians. The flagship of the Peruvian River Flotilla was the gunboat America, with two 37mm deck guns and two machine guns. It was supported by three river boats, the Loreto, the Estefita, and the Tarapoto, with the latter converted into a temporary hospital ship. The hospital ship was expected to be fully occupied as the fighting was to take place in one of the unhealthiest environments in the world. Aboard this flotilla were 450 Peruvian soldiers under the command of Colonel Oscar. R. Benavides. Once the Peruvians, with their superior numbers and overwhelming firepower, were ashore on July 10, the outcome was never in doubt. After a couple of days’ fighting, the Colombian garrison wisely retreated into the jungle to try and make its way back to their base. The victorious Peruvians occupied Pedrera on the 12th but most of the force was then ordered back to Iquitos. The conflict was a typical example of inadequate resources and long and tenuous supply lines, meaning that only small numbers of troops could be put into the theater. Peru and Colombia had scores to settle and they were always going to clash along their disputed border. It was to be over 20 years, however, before a major war broke out between the two nations (see Chapter 9).

## Civil Conflict in Paraguay 1904–12

Since the late 1800s, the impoverished South American country of Paraguay had seen political rivalry between its long-established Colorado Party and the relatively new Liberal Party. In 1904, Paraguay was under the control of President Juan Antonio Escurra of the Colorado Party. Two Liberal leaders, Manuel J. Duarte and General Benigno Ferreira, unwilling to wait to defeat him by democratic means, decided to launch a revolution to overthrow Escurra. On August 4, the rebels sailed up the Paraguay River aboard a converted merchant ship, the Sojonia, and attacked the government's main gunboat, the Villa Rica. After several hours of close-quarters fighting opposite the town of Pilar, the Villa Rica was captured, after 28 of its crew had been killed. The rebel ships – now renamed the Libertad and the Constitucion – along with two smaller boats, sailed up the Paraguay River to the capital, Asuncion. The Liberal leaders had little respect for President Escurra and told him via telegram that he was "an incompetent, uneducated oaf who degraded the presidency." They threatened to bombard the presidential palace unless he agreed to immediately step down from office. To their surprise, Escurra called their bluff and ordered his loyal troops out from their barracks to shell the rebel fleet, which then withdrew. Some army units did join the revolution, however, and there was street fighting in Asuncion on August 14 and 15, in which eight soldiers died. Once the rebels had been chased out of the city, the fighting turned into a low-level guerrilla conflict, with neither side able to win a decisive victory. The rebel fleet sailed up and down the Paraguay River, taking every river town they came to without meeting much resistance. Liberal control of the river, which was the main source of supplies for the government, meant that, despite having 10,000 troops in Asuncion, Escurra could do little. He did not have the ammunition to equip a large expeditionary force and when he did send smaller bodies of troops out of the capital they usually deserted. His appeals to Brazil and Argentina for aid went unanswered – the Argentinians in particular were pro-Liberal. Rebel forces gathered to the north of Asuncion, under the banner of the Army of the North, and fought a series of small-scale battles against Escurra’s troops. Negotiations had been going on throughout the summer and autumn between the two parties, but Escurra’s offer to stand down as long as some of his Colorado colleagues remained in government was rejected by the Liberals. By early December, President Escurra realized that he could not win the war, and finally agreed to step down unconditionally on December 12, 1904.



**The crew of a Paraguayan 37mm pom-pom gun have positioned their weapon at a street corner in the capital Asuncion during the 1904 Liberal revolution. Only a handful of these "sophisticated" and expensive artillery pieces could have been purchased by the Paraguayan Government. They were to appear during most of the subsequent revolutions in Paraguay in 1908, 1911, 1912, and 1922. Weapons like this were really a luxury that a poor nation like Paraguay could not afford when some of its troops did not have a modern rifle. (Collection Javier Yubi)**

## The Presidential "Merry Go Round," 1904–12

Now that the Liberals were in power, the pre-existing schisms within their party came to the surface. From 1904 until 1911, there was a chaotic "merry go round" of Paraguayan presidents, with the two Liberal Party factions, the "Civicos" and the "Radicals," constantly vying for power. In December 1905, the Civico faction deposed the Radical president, Juan Bautista Gaona, and replaced him as interim president with Cecilio Baez. An attempt at bringing the two Liberal factions together saw a compromise candidate, Benigno Ferreira, taking the presidency in November 1906. Ferreira almost immediately faced strong opposition from the Radical faction led by Manuel Gondra. This opposition eventually saw the overthrow of Ferreira by sections of the army in July 1908. The rebel army units were led by Colonel Albino Jara, a strong Radical supporter, who imposed another interim president, Emiliano Gonzalez Navero. In November 1910, the leader of the Radical faction, Manuel Gondra, assumed the presidency and the Radicals now appeared to be in total control of Paraguay. He faced opposition from his newly appointed war minister, Colonel Albino Jara, until recently his staunchest supporter. In January 1911, Jara used his loyal units to again depose a president, this time his former ally and mentor Gondra. Jara installed himself as president and defeated a pro-Gondra rebellion led by the former interior minister, Adolfo Riquelme. The rebellion was defeated and the unfortunate Riquelme put up against a wall and shot. Albino Jara's rule quickly proved to be unpopular and he in turn was overthrown by his "loyal" troops in July 1911. Jara was replaced by a new president, Liberato Marcial Rojas, who subsequently defeated a Radical-led rebellion, with help from the Civico faction. On February 28, 1912, the Civico faction decided to depose Rojas themselves and took power, placing Pedro Pena in the presidential seat.

## The 1912 Revolution

Even as Pena was settling into his presidential palace in Asuncion, the Radical Liberal rebels were preparing to fight his regime. Once organized, their forces, made up of pro-Liberal regular units, began to advance from their bases towards the capital. The Liberal, or Gondrist, rebels suffered a major setback on March 1, when a Liberal troop train was blown up by a government train filled with dynamite. Government troops had sent the driverless train careering into the Liberal train, which was crammed with 2,000 soldiers and two 75mm field guns. Hundreds of troops and civilians were killed but, undeterred, the rebels continued their advance on Asuncion. They gathered an army of 5,500 men and 20 artillery pieces, including a few 37mm pom-pom cannon and 14 machine guns, and resumed their advance. They were faced by a government army of 2,800 men, which was the largest force President Pena could muster. The defeat of 800 government troops on the 14th further depleted the force available to defend the capital, which was reduced to 1,300 men by the time the rebels attacked. On March 17, the rebel assault on Asuncion began. The most intense fighting for the capital took place between the 19th and 21st, during which time government troops launched several desperate counterattacks that delayed the city’s fall by a few more days. On the 21st, the Pena government abandoned Asuncion, with the president and 800 of his followers leaving on a Brazilian river boat.

## The Battle of Paraguari

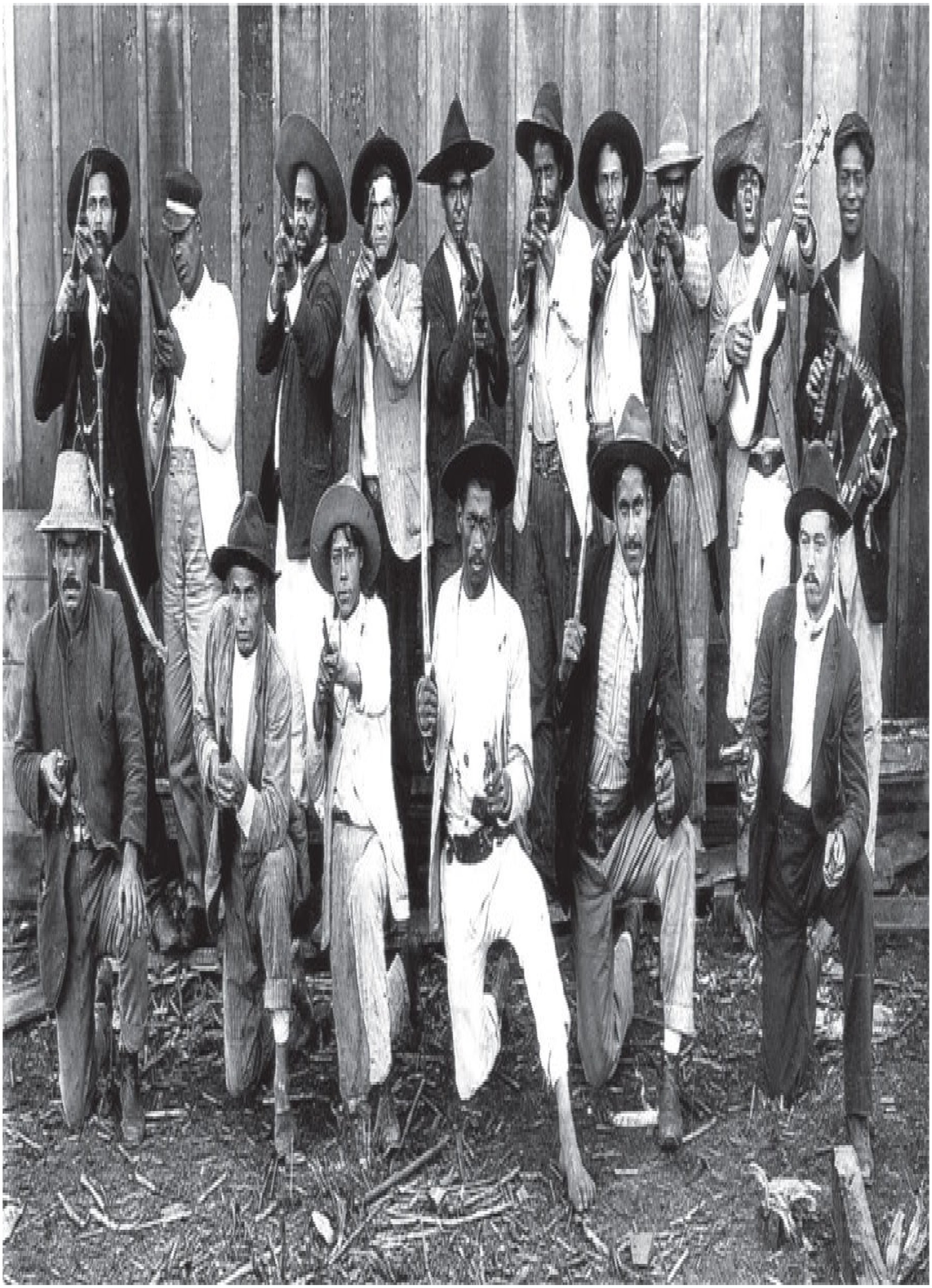
After the defeat of Pena’s government, a new president, Emiliano Gonzales Navero, was appointed. He had around 5,000 men with which to defend his new regime and almost immediately had to deal with another expresident, Colonel Albino Jara, who in March 1912 was still in the field seeking to restore himself to the presidency he had lost the previous July. He was opposed to any government that did not include him and his popularity with many Paraguayans gave his claims some legitimacy. Jara’s rebel force of 1,500 men each carried around 100 bullets for the campaign. His artillery consisted of four old cannon, one Krupp M1885 mountain gun and one quick-firing Maxim-Nordenfelt gun. In addition, he had four machine guns, a mixture of Vickers and Maxims. The two armies were in constant contact during the first few weeks of May, as Jara tried to gather more support for his doomed cause. On May 11, his army approached the town of Paraguari, which had been fortified by the government army of 3,500 men under the command of Manlio Shenone. The experienced colonel had gathered information on his enemies as Jara and his troops approached Paraguari. Jara was well aware that his main weakness, apart from numbers, was his inferiority in both field guns and machine guns. On the 12th, the rebels advanced but faced a heavy bombardment from government guns dug in on several hilltops. Other mountain guns were brought forward by Shenone’s men and Jara’s few artillery pieces found themselves completely outgunned. The rebels now made a series of disorganized attacks on the dug-in government troops. With the large number of machine guns available to them, the defenders mowed down the attackers in their hundreds. When these first assaults were thrown back, Jara and his commanders took shelter in a ravine, from where they tried to reorganize their forces. Jara and his men were soon spotted by Shenone’s machine gunners in the overlooking hills and their position was raked with heavy fire. During the firefight Jara was shot in the abdomen several times, while many of his officers and men were killed. He was carried from the battlefield and taken to a nearby house, where he received basic medical care. Meanwhile, his troops were trying to surrender to the vengeful government troops but many were shot out of hand. Jara died in agony on May 15, by which time his army had ceased to exist and the remnants were trying to save their own skins as best they could. The battle at Paraguari ended the civil war and Paraguay saw a period of relative peace for at least a decade.

**Brazilian Federal Army soldiers rest on the tracks of one the railways that was vital to victory during the long running Contestado War of 1912–16. The Federal forces fighting the rebels were a mixture of regulars, militia, and local irregulars, including 1,000 “hired guns.” Government forces used all the technology available to their advantage and in the later stages of the war had a few aircraft to perform reconnaissance flights over rebel territory. The soldiers here are wearing a mix of straw hats, Stetsons, and peaked caps with their simple cotton uniforms. (Cody Images)**

## “Holy War”– The Contestado War 1912–16

In the 1910s in northern Brazil, what started as a land dispute erupted into a particularly nasty “Holy War.” The conflict began in the Contestado region, which was a disputed piece of land sandwiched between the states of Santa Catarina and Parana. When a railway was built in the region in the 1890s, the local peasant settlers were forced from their land, a move which they bitterly opposed. Calls by the displaced people for the return of their land were supported by a local mystic called Jose Maria de Santa Janerim. He turned the land dispute into a religious crusade, calling on the people to follow him in a holy war against the Federal Government. They adopted a white flag with a green cross in the center as their banner and began to gather weapons from wherever they could. As the dispute escalated, the men and women who followed Janerim became known simply as “Contestados,” after the disputed region. During 1911, Janerim preached to anyone who would listen in Santa Catarina State and gradually built up a fanatical following of armed supporters. They formed themselves into bands but were poorly armed, depending on a few captured weapons and hunting guns brought from their homes. Most rebel groups had a few rifles, with the majority of the rebels armed, at least initially, with machetes. In 1912 the rebels, numbering several thousand, moved into neighboring Parana State but were countered by the local militia and the Parana Security Regiment. They were forced back into Santa Catarina State, where they continued their attacks on local garrisons in an effort to capture precious arms and ammunition. When their leader was killed in the battle of Irani on October 22, the rebels chose new commanders and continued the fight. One prominent Contestado leader from 1912 until 1915 was the enigmatic teenager Maria Rosa. She was compared in Brazil to Medieval France's Joan of Arc and led her band of rebels with the same religious fervor. Maria Rosa was only 15 when she became the main rebel military commander and had an army of 6,000 under her command. Although officially she was in command, she had the support of older, more experienced male commanders. She is purported to have gone into battle on a white horse and wearing flowers in her hair but certainly knew how to handle a rifle. Eventually she was to command up to 10,000 fighters, in what became known as the "Enchanted Army of Sao Sebastiao." For the next two years the rebels continued their low-level guerrilla campaign and the Brazilian Government was content to leave the local state forces to combat them.

The government eventually grew tired of the rebels and their annoying attacks on Federal garrisons and towns. They sent a 7,000-strong expeditionary army against them in September 1914, made up of a mixture of regular and irregular troops. The irregulars included local militia, armed police, and a number of "vaguenos" or hired guns. Although this force was not large, it was, at the time, almost two-thirds of the available manpower of the Brazilian Federal Army. Importantly, this army was well equipped, with a number of machine guns and mountain guns that would give them a great advantage in the coming campaign. They were under the command of General Fernando Setembrino de Carvalho, whose instructions were simply to regain control of the region. His first step was to secure the railways that ran through the disputed region and to station substantial numbers of troops along the tracks. Carvalho also offered good terms to any rebel Contestados who surrendered but promised harsh treatment for those who refused to give up. This offer was rejected by vast majority of rebels but was to become more important as Carvalho's military campaign progressed. He then split his forces into four forces or "wings" – North, East, South, and West – and distributed his regulars and irregulars amongst them. His plan was to blockade the rebel-held area and starve them out, rather than trying to storm their fortified strongholds. He knew that the rebels would defend these to the last man, undoubtedly leading to heavy casualties that he could not afford. Carvalho's army was then provided with an asset unprecedented in Latin America in 1914 – an air force. Five precious aircraft were sent to the region but unfortunately there were only two pilots available to fly them. The aircraft were all French and consisted of four Morane-Saulniers of various models and a single Bleriot XI. An airfield was constructed in the war zone and the two pilots began flying reconnaissance missions over rebel-held territory. One pilot was killed during the fighting, although it is unclear whether this was an accident or the result of rebel ground fire.



**A typical group of Contestado rebel fighters pose in front of a barn armed with an assortment of weapons. Their firearms vary from revolvers to Mauser rifles and bird guns, as well as a few cutlasses. The shortage of both modern weaponry and ammunition meant that the rebels had to rely on numbers to overcome Federal forces. It was a testament to their morale that the rebels were able to resist the Brazilian Government army for over four years. (Cody Images)**

Carvalho’s superiority allowed his troops to relatively swiftly surround all the main concentrations of rebels. As one commentator said, by this stage in the conflict the war was basically “machetes against machine guns.” Hunger began to take a severe toll on the blockaded rebel strongholds and a number surrendered as a result. It is estimated that a total of 10,000 people died of hunger during the four years of the war. Those who surrendered now were largely old men, women, and children, suggesting this was a strategy, leaving a hard core of rebels to continue the war. In March 1915 Maria Rosa was killed in a skirmish typical of the conflict, although by this stage in the war her role may have been largely symbolic. By late 1915 about 50,000 Contestado civilians and some 8,000 fighters, now under the leadership of Deodato Manuel Ramos, were still holding out. Ramos, known as “Adeodata,” was a strict disciplinarian who was in no mood to give up the fight. Any of his followers who suggested surrender received harsh treatment and any who actively tried to surrender were sentenced to death. By December 1915, only a few rebel strongholds continued to resist, with hunger and disease killing large numbers. In early February 1916, the last of these strongholds, Santa Maria, came under attack from Carvalho’s “South” army. On the 8th, the first assaults began, with the well-fed and equipped Federal troops fighting starving and poorly armed rebels. The starving rebels continued to resist throughout February and into March, but their situation was now desperate. By March 28, the Federal force besieging Santa Maria had been strengthened to 1,085 men, with plenty of machine guns and several artillery pieces. Santa Maria finally fell on April 8, but Adeodata and a small group of his men had already escaped into the surrounding jungle. Even though the war was now officially over, Adeodata and his few remaining men held out in the jungle until August 1916. The last leader of the Contestados was captured and put on trial. Although surprisingly he escaped the firing squad, he was sentenced to 30 years in prison.

**These Ecuadorian soldiers of the 64th Battalion pose for a photograph outside their jungle headquarters in 1913. Although the men are fairly well armed and clothed, their straw hats are in various styles, including a civilian boater worn by the soldier on the right. It can also be noted that there is a real ethnic mix in this small unit, with officers of Hispanic or mixed appearance and other ranks of black origin. In most Latin American societies, the color of a soldier's skin would heavily influence the rank he could attain. (Ecuadorian History Museum)**

# The "Concha War" 1913–16

The South American country of Ecuador had seen the same kind of political upheavals as other Latin American nations in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Since September 1912 and without a constitution, Ecuador had suffered under the harsh rule of President Leonidas Plaza. There had been armed clashes between the government and its opponents in 1895, 1911, and 1912. Throughout the 17-year period of these civil conflicts, a military commander called Carlos Concha Torres had supported the cause of the former president of Ecuador, Elroy Alfaro. In 1913 "Concha," as he was known, began yet another campaign to try and force the introduction of a constitution. On September 24, he led his small army of 150 men into the heavily forested northern province of Esmeraldas. After attacking a local police station and capturing some rifles, Concha proclaimed his rebellion against the government. He made his usual demands, calling for a constitution and asking all patriotic Ecuadorians to join his cause. The swift response of the Ecuadorian Government was to dispatch a destroyer, the Libertador Bolivar, packed with troops to Esmeraldas. After disembarking, the Loyalist troops had little trouble in pushing the few hundred men of Concha's army south into the jungle. Despite this reverse, the rebel army managed to expand, and by December, Concha had some 700 men under his banner. In the three-day battle of El Guayabo, fought between December 10 and 12, the rebels defeated a superior Loyalist force of 1,244 men, killing 312 of them with losses of only 23 men. The dispirited Loyalist forces were ordered to abandon the province to the rebels, while the government decided how to deal with the rebellion. Concha’s hope was that other provinces would join Esmeraldas in its rebellion. Elroy Alfaro did start a small revolt in Marani province, but it soon fizzled out. The government response came a few weeks later with a naval blockade of the Esmeraldas coastline. At the same time the Libertador Bolivar and another ship, the Constitucion, sailed up and down the coast bombarding rebel-held towns. For 12 days from December 26, the two warships shelled the province’s coastline, causing heavy civilian casualties. They also sent small forces across the provincial border, clashing with Concha’s troops, whose numbers had grown to 1,200. In February 1914, the government sent 2,000 more troops to deal with the rebels, while the navy’s blockade prevented the rebels from receiving any military supplies. Loyalist troops were landed at several points along the coastline and put under the command of Concha’s nephew, Colonel Enrique Valdez Conca. It is not known how the arrival of his nephew as the enemy commander affected Concha, but the intensity of the fighting now increased considerably. Conca began transporting his troops down the coast, landing units at various strategic points behind rebel lines. He was sent further reinforcements, and these allowed him to push the rebels away from the coast into the jungle by March. April and May saw two small battles between the rival armies, with the first, at Camarones, being a particularly bitter affair. Fought on April 12, the battle resulted in crippling losses for the rebel army, with 400 of Concha’s men being killed in the battle. The victorious Loyalist army then proceeded to execute, in cold blood, 50 prisoners taken in the battle. Although much reduced in numbers, Concha’s men took some revenge in the two-day battle of La Propecia on May 8 and 9, where 200 Loyalist troops were killed. It can be assumed that any prisoners taken received the same treatment from the rebels as that meted out to their comrades a month earlier.

Both armies, exhausted, now rested while they licked their wounds from the two battles but soldiers began to fall ill in large numbers from a series of tropical diseases. Troops were struck down with typhus, dysentery, tuberculosis, beri-beri, malaria, and yellow fever. The ravages of these diseases forced Loyalist troops to withdraw from their jungle bases into fortified camps, where special hospitals were opened to treat the sick. Although the rebels were also suffering from sickness, Concha capitalized on the inactivity of the Loyalist troops to launch a new campaign, although in reality this was little more than a low-level guerrilla war. Concha did finally receive some limited support from further afield. In the northern provinces of Imbabura and Carchi, a small force commanded by one Colonel Alejandro Andrade launched a small-scale guerrilla campaign, but it had no meaningful impact, with the largest skirmish involving only 50 casualties.

**Ecuadorian rebels gather around their commander, Carlos Concha Torres, who leans on the barrel of one of his small army’s cannon in 1913. The rebellion by Concha in support of the former president, Elroy Alfaro, was fought only in the province of Esmeraldas. Most of the campaign was dominated by the effects of the local endemic diseases on both the rebel and government forces. At times during the two-year campaign, fighting was virtually suspended while the large number of sick soldiers was nursed back to health. (Cody Images)**

Late 1914 saw an upsurge in fighting, with the Loyalist forces recovered and reinforced and the rebels on the offensive. The rebels took the town of La Piedras after a week’s heavy fighting, then captured Tachina, where 139 Loyalists were killed. In total, December 1914 and January 1915 saw 63 engagements fought in what appeared to be an endless war. February 24, 1915 marked a nadir for the rebels, when their enigmatic leader Concha was captured. Surprisingly, the loss of Concha did not lead to rebel collapse, and with a new leader, Enrique Torres, elected, the rebels continued to resist the Loyalist army. For the next year and a half, the guerrilla war continued, with the rebels initiating another intense period of fighting in the summer of 1916. In September, during this phase of the war, the rebels suffered two defeats, one at El Piejo and the other at Rio Verde. The election of a new president, Alfredo do Baquerizo, on September 1 saw a genuine attempt by the government to end the three-year-long war. On September 8, Baquerizo offered an amnesty to the remaining rebels and on November 7 the last 400-strong rebel force surrendered.

## The Sapoa Revolution – Costa Rica 1919

The Central American state of Costa Rica, with its population of 450,000, had been ruled since 1917 by Federico Tinoco. He had come to power on January 17 in a bloodless coup and had soon established a dictatorship. This was achieved with the support of his war minister, and brother, the 38-year-old Jose Joaquin

Tinoco Granados. The brothers ruled Costa Rica with an iron fist and quickly became unpopular, relying on the 900 men of their army to keep them in power. Opposition to the brothers soon surfaced and, in February 1918, the so-called “Rio Grande Revolution” took place. This halfhearted rebellion was organized by the journalist Fernandez Guell, who died during the fighting. Although the army had remained loyal to the brothers in 1918, the Tinoco brothers did not really trust their troops to support them in the face of a better organized rebellion. Their well-organized intelligence network warned them that another revolution was being planned. Their agents, however, could not find out if it would be launched from Nicaragua to the north, from Panama to the south, or from the sea. From January 1919 the Tinoco government began to send more troops to the Nicaraguan border, and 200 were sent to protect the Pacific coastline. Additional troops were sent to the border with Nicaragua in late April and early May 1919 after the government received reports of rebel troops gathering there.

## The Two Armies

The government of Federico Tinoco had an army of about 5,000 men in January 1919, with a number of Maxim heavy machine guns and four 65mm mountain guns. They also had two 75mm field guns, purchased from Chile in the months before the fighting began. Tinoco had little trust in either his officers or men and some soldiers were only issued with bullets for their rifles when they were in the front line. Liberal exiles from Nicaragua played a major role in the Costa Rican Army, with 1,000 of their troops serving under the command of Nicaraguan Samuel Santos. Another Nicaraguan, Colonel Arroliga, was an artillery expert who had commanded Liberal artillery during an earlier revolution. In April 1919, as war seemed inevitable, Tinoco issued an appeal for other Nicaraguan Liberals to join his army. By the time the real fighting began Tinoco’s army had reportedly reached a strength of 8,000 men. However, many of these new recruits were being sent to the front with no training and little enthusiasm for Tinoco’s cause, although some were seen marching through the streets of San Jose shouting “Viva Tinoco!” and “Death to Chao!” (one of the rebel leaders). These enthusiastic soldiers were probably in the minority, as few Costa Ricans supported Tinoco. The leadership of the revolutionary forces was initially given to Alfredo Volio Jimenez, but he was killed in an early skirmish while crossing the Sapoa River. His place was taken by Julio Acosta Garcia, who would prove to be an adequate military commander. Garcia relied heavily on the support of the Mexican General Manuel Chao, a former commander in Pancho Villa’s Division of the North and a veteran of the Mexican Revolution (see Chapters 2 and 3). The rebels had hired him in April and he had joined them in their Nicaraguan base. The rebels managed to acquire a few Mauser rifles and bribed the commander of a local arsenal to sell them 200 Remington rifles for $20,000. By the time the rebels were ready to begin the revolution, they had 300 rifles and 50,000 rounds of ammunition. The rebels also bought 80 machetes with which to arm their volunteers, in case they were unable to acquire additional rifles. Their most significant purchase was four M1895 machine guns – US Army surplus items sold after the end of World War I. The rebels were organized into four companies by General Chao and drilled as thoroughly as possible in the circumstances. It was reported that the rebel army was a little top heavy with a large number of colonels and generals but not enough foot soldiers. Every officer in the rebel army was, however, issued with a Colt .45 automatic pistol, courtesy of the Nicaraguan National Guard. The main weakness of the rebel army was that it was largely a foreign force, at least half of which were Nicaraguans and with Costa Ricans in a minority. Other reports even claimed that out of the total rebel force of 1,000 men, only 20 were Costa Ricans. Most of the Nicaraguan soldiers were mercenaries fighting not for the revolution but for $2 in gold per day and as much loot as they could take. The rebel leadership hoped these foreign “volunteers” would be a spearhead, with thousands of Costa Ricans hopefully flocking to their cause once they crossed the border.

## The May Campaign

By late April, reports were arriving in the capital, San Jose, of rebel movements on the Nicaraguan border. Reports of groups of 150 to 300 rebel troops moving around the border region became more frequent in the last days of April. As he did not know precisely where the threat would develop, Tinoco stationed most of his 8,000 troops on the frontier in a number of armed camps. These troops were in a poor state, badly trained and clothed, with many having no uniforms or equipment. On May 2, rebels clashed with some of these troops who were acting as Frontier Guards. Finally, on the 4th, a rebel force crossed the Nicaraguan frontier into Costa Rica, advanced on the town of Santa Rosa, and stormed it on

May 8, capturing a large cache of rifles and other weapons, which were distributed to any Costa Ricans who volunteered to fight. Rebel troops took the town of Pena Blanca on May 6 and declared a provisional government there. Several weeks of small-scale battles followed between what were effectively two wretched armies. Few Costa Ricans had come forward to join the revolution and government troops were unwilling to fight. Those losses suffered by the Tinoco army were made good by press-ganging local youths, which further eroded army morale. At San Carlos across the Nicaraguan border, the rebels had managed to gather a few hundred more men who received arms and ammunition on May 22, ready to join their comrades fighting in Costa Rica. A relatively small battle fought a few days later was, however, about to decide the outcome of the Sapoa Revolution.

## The Battle of Santa Rosa

The decisive battle of the 1919 revolution took place on May 26 when 300 rebels attacked a government army of 800 men at El Jobo Ranch near the town of Santa Rosa. The four companies of the rag-tag rebel army were under the command of General Manuel Chao. Units of Tinoco’s army, under Colonel Roberto Tinoco, had established a formidable defensive position at Jobo Ranch. The Tinoco troops had fortified a farmhouse at the center of their position, with stone walls forming a barrier to any frontal attack. In addition to the force of 800, it was defended by Maxim machine guns and a few Skoda mountain guns. The rebels under Chao advanced towards Jobo with a total of 225 men but, as they neared the enemy positions, 100 spilt off to form a flanking column. Included in the smaller column was a 15-man machine gun unit under the command of a drunkard, Salvador Reyes. Reyes drank heavily during the march and in his stupor decided to break cover and confront the enemy at close quarters. His men left their jungle cover and were exposed to the enemy only 150 yards in front of their machine gun posts. When they had recovered from the shock of the sudden appearance of the rebels in front of their positions, the defenders’ machine guns soon killed all of the 15 attackers. Not only had the unit’s machine guns been lost, but any element of surprise had gone and the defenders were alerted to the main rebel assault. Chao immediately ordered a frontal attack, while sending a 50-strong force to try and retrieve the lost machine guns. The rebel attack now became a suicide mission, with raw recruits throwing themselves against the well-entrenched defenders. Chao’s men had been told that the “cowardly” government troops would drop their rifles when they came under attack. Seeing that this was not the case, at least half of the attacking force turned around and ran for the cover of the jungle. The defenders showed no inclination to sally out from their positions, however, and a five-hour firefight began. This only ended when the rebels began to run out of ammunition and the remaining troops gathered their wounded and withdrew into the safety of the surrounding jungle. They had to avoid the Tinoco column, commanded by Nicaraguan Samuel Santos, coming from the town of Ahogados. As the defenders did not seem overly keen to pursue the defeated rebels, most managed to reach the border. Roberto Tinoco was given the credit for the Santa Rosa victory and was promoted to the rank of brigade general.

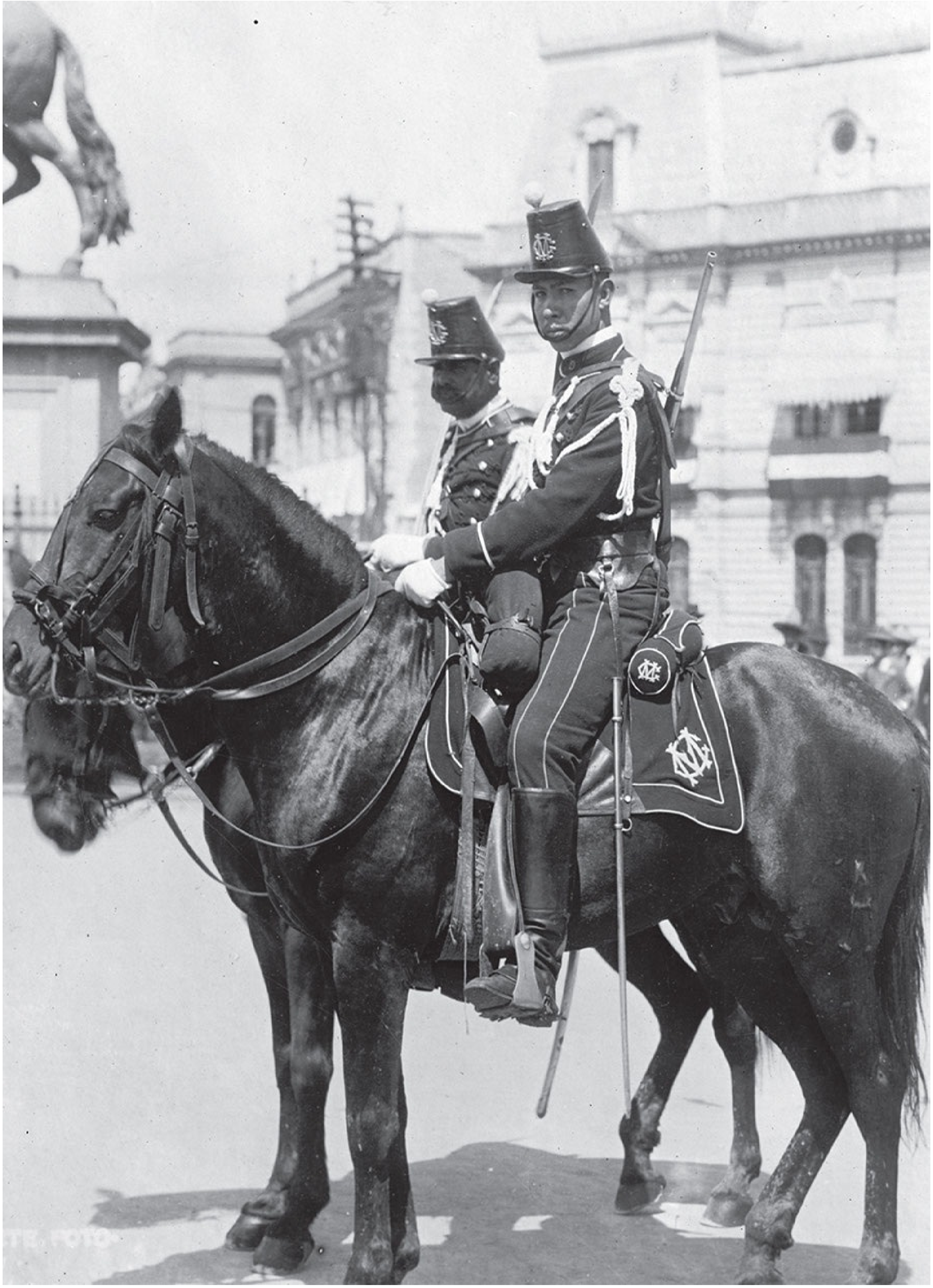
**Manuel Chao, the 36-year-old unemployed ex-Villista general of the Mexican Revolution, went to Costa Rica in 1919 to join the rebels trying to overthrow the dictator Federico Tinico. Chao was head of artillery in Pancho Villa's Division of the North from 1913 until 1915 and his military experience was a real asset for the rebels. After the defeat of the rebels he left Costa Rica but returned in 1921 to take part in the Coto War with Panama. In 1923 he returned to Mexico to take part in the de la Huerta rebellion and was shot at the age of 40 in its aftermath. (Library of Congress)**

## The Fall of the Tinoco Brothers

The government victory at Santa Rosa did not end the Tinoco brothers' mounting problems. Having faced two revolutions in two years in power, the brothers were, unsurprisingly, paranoid. In response to this political and military pressure, in June the brothers had dispatched emissaries to the Central American states of Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador, trying to buy arms. Although they managed to strengthen their army, it was not military but international pressure that was wearing them down. The Tinoco regime was not recognized by the USA because they suspected the brothers of pro-German sympathies, despite President Federico Tinoco's pro-Allied declarations. Pressure was exerted on President Tinoco and his brother by the USA but they resisted calls for Federico to resign. When, in early August, his brother Jose was assassinated in the capital, Federico Tinoco was utterly devastated. The death of his brother left him friendless and bereft of any reliable allies. On August 13, Tinoco wisely decided to quit Costa Rica while he still could and resigned. He spent the next 12 years in comfortable exile in Paris, dying there, largely forgotten, in 1931. Back in Costa Rica, US Marines had landed to safeguard their country's interests and to support the democratic election on June 4, 1920. The US-backed candidate, Julio Acosta Garcia, won the election and ran the country for the four years. In the aftermath of the 1919 revolution, the Costa Rican Army had entirely lost the respect of the Costa Rican people. Service in the army was so unpopular that the vast majority of funding was withdrawn and it shrank from 8,000 men to only 1,000 by 1920.

* The Gauchos were the cowboys of Latin America who herded the beef cattle of the region, and were superb horsemen with their own distinctive culture. They were present in Brazil, Uruguay, and Argentina, and in the 1800s and early 1900s often formed the cavalry elements of the armies of these nations.

# “LAND OR LIBERTY”


TE. FOTO

Nervous-looking Mexican cavalrymen are on parade in Mexico City in 1910 just before the start of the Mexican Revolution. Although they wear their brightly colored 19th-century-style parade uniform with leather shako, they are armed with modern carbines and sabers. The official strength of the Federal Army was surprisingly small at 30,000 men but the real figure was somewhere between 14,000 and 28,000. (Library of Congress)

## President Diaz's Rule, 1880–1911

By 1910 most Mexicans could not remember a time when Porfirio Diaz had not been president of Mexico. He had ruled Mexico for 34 years and his regime, although authoritarian, had brought stability to the country. The stability of the Mexican economy brought considerable foreign investment and the ruling classes benefited greatly from the new-found wealth. The bulk of the populace continued to live in abject poverty, however, with no hope of improving their circumstances. This huge imbalance of wealth and poverty was common across the globe in the early 20th century, and by 1910, as in other countries where the poor had nothing to lose, revolution simmered. Throughout his term, President Diaz had enjoyed the support of the Catholic Church, the country's elite, and the army. Particularly important to Diaz's grip on power were the Rurales, armed police who kept the rural peasants (11 million of the country's 12 million population) in check. In the early years of the 20th century, anti-Diaz politicians had begun to emerge and the old president just about tolerated them. When Diaz announced that he was standing for an eighth term as president, things came to a head, however, and the opposition made their move. On October 5, the middle-class Liberal politician Francisco Madero denounced the re-election of Diaz. From his exile in the USA, Madero called for an armed rebellion against the Diaz government. Madero and his fellow Liberals began to plan for the uprising due on November 20, 1910.

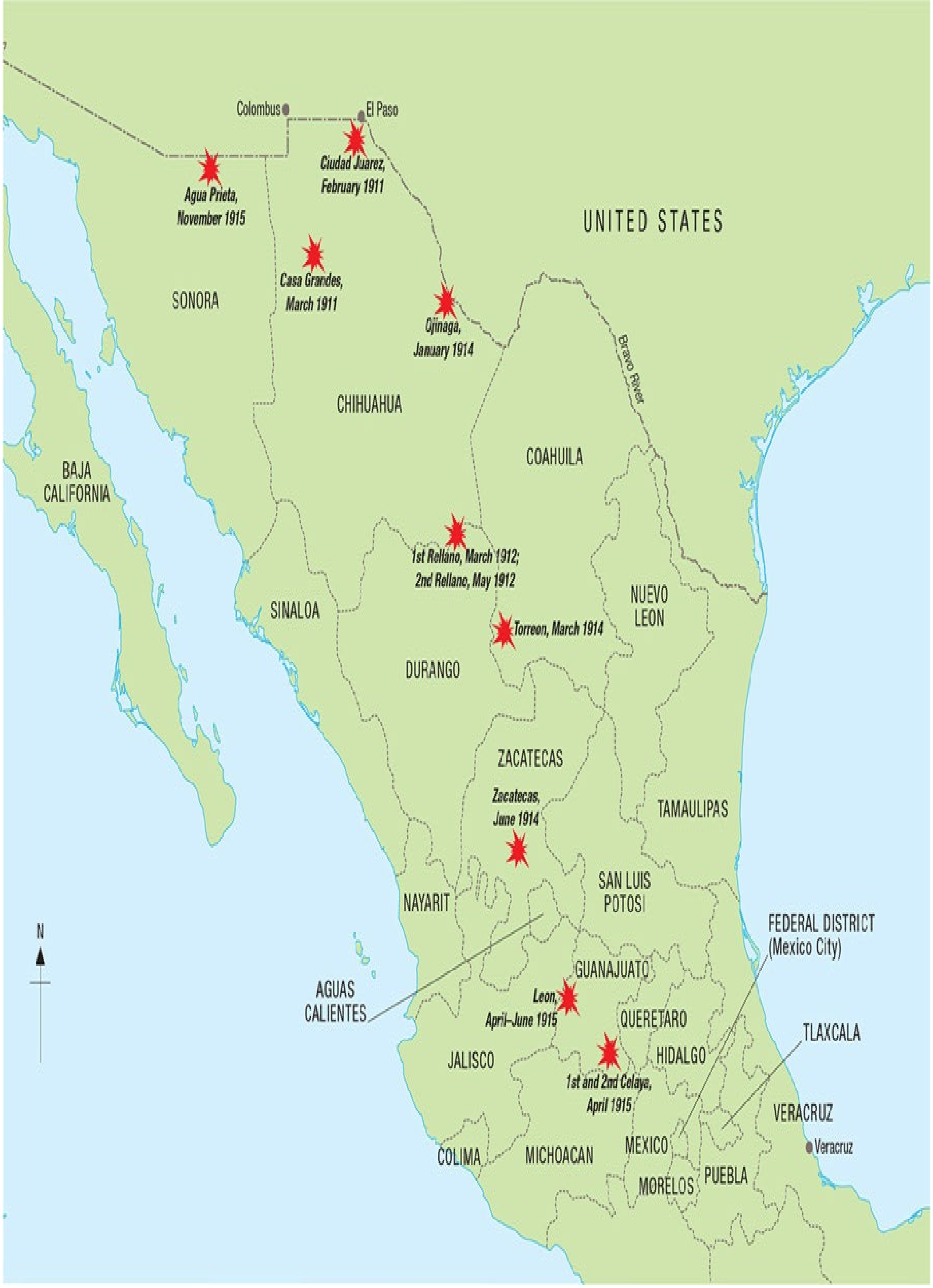
**This photograph of President Porfirio Diaz sees him in the last years of his long rule. Diaz had fought in the war against French occupation in the 1860s and had been in power almost continually since 1877. His first term in office lasted until 1880 when he officially handed over power to his “puppet,” General Gonzalez. After the general’s term ended in 1884, Diaz dropped the pretense of sharing power and stayed in office until 1911. He was re-elected several times during the next 20 years as the myth of democracy in Mexico was maintained. His final re-election in July 1910 was the final straw for opposition politicians and many of the Mexican people. (Cody Images)**

## The Porfirista Army in 1911

By 1911, the Mexican Federal Army, which had kept President Diaz in power for so long, was in a sorry state. It was too small, poorly led by largely corrupt officers, and its were men badly trained or even totally untrained. The army’s only role for many years had been to subdue the peasantry and fight the incessant wars against the Yaqui and other Indian tribes.

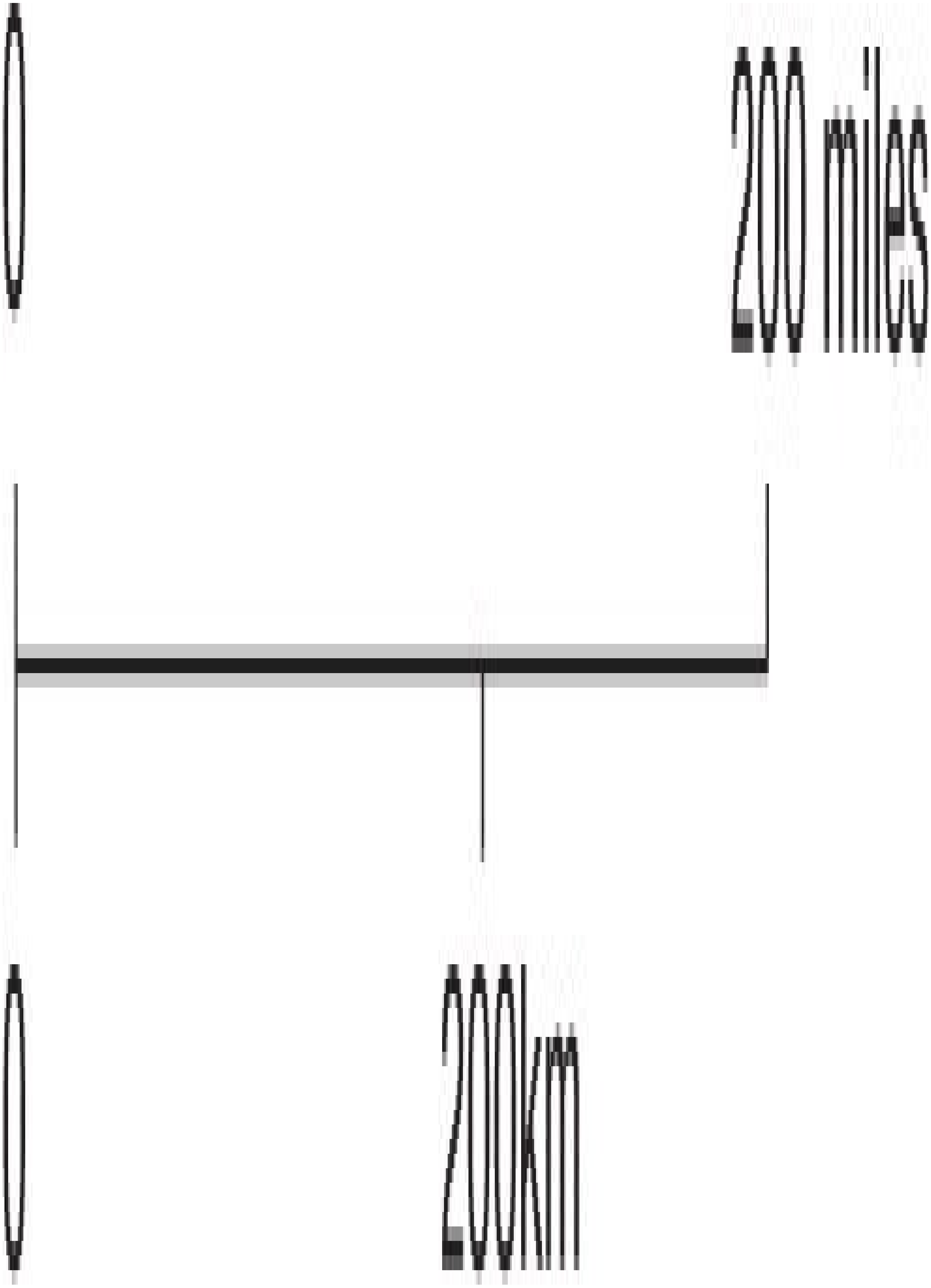
One Porfirista officer was honest enough to admit that the army was “ill equipped, badly trained and incompetently led by officers devoid of either theoretical knowledge or battlefield experience.” Another commentator said it was the “worst in the world,” with yet another adding that it was fit only “for parades.” Although Diaz had been notoriously tight-fisted with the military budget, in his defense he could not trust his generals to spend the money wisely. He was well aware that, far from being spent on new arms and equipment, the bulk of any increased military budget would find its way into the pockets of corrupt officers. The usual method was the age old “padded roll,” in which wages for dead or non-existent soldiers were claimed by their officers. The army was also small: its official strength was 30,000 men, but in reality there may have been as few as 14,000 front-line troops. With corruption endemic in the army, it is hard to say how many men were actually serving in 1911. A Porfirista army battalion had a “paper” strength of 2,000 men, but in reality could have as few as 300. The problem of generally poor-quality officers was compounded by the fact that most senior officers were ancient – many in their 60s, 70s and even

80s. As long as all that was required was to crush unarmed peasants they could cope, but their limitations became glaringly obvious as soon as they faced a more formidable foe.


Colombus
El Paso
Ciudad Juarez, February 1911
Agua Prieta, November 1915
UNITED STATES
Casa Grandes, March 1911
SONORA
Ojinaga, January 1914
Bravo River
CHIHUAHUA
COAHUILA
BAJA CALIFORNIA
1st Rellano, March 1912; 2nd Rellano, May 1912
NUEVO LEON
SINALOA
Torreon, March 1914
DURANGO
ZACATECAS
Zacatecas, June 1914
TAMAULIPAS
SAN LUIS POTOSI
NAYARIT
N
FEDERAL DISTRICT (Mexico City)
GUANAJUATO
AGUAS CALIENTES
Leon, April–June 1915
QUERETARO
TLAXCALA
HIDALGO
JALISCO
1st and 2nd Celaya, April 1915
VERACRUZ
MEXICO
Veracruz
COLIMA
MICHOACAN
MORELOS
PUEBLA

# Conflict in Northern and Central Mexico

Battles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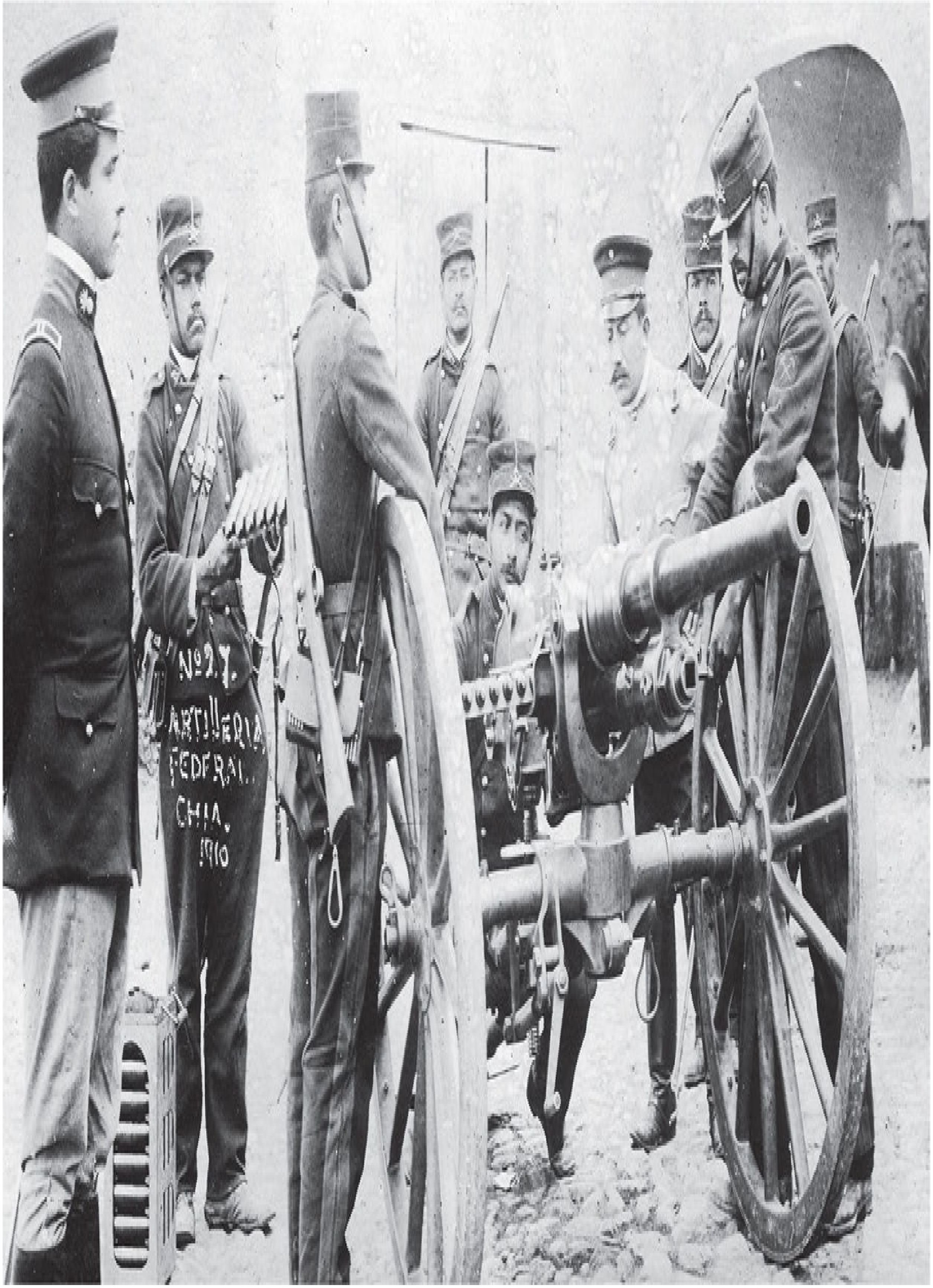
## The Army of Liberation 1911

Groups of anti-Diaz fighters began to gather in northern Mexico soon after the call to arms by Francisco Madero. He gave his motley group of volunteers the grand title of “Ejercito Libertador,” or Army of Liberation. Although there was a ground swell of support for a revolution, the lack of arms and ammunition was to be the limiting factor in the coming struggle. The small bands of rebels were often ex-bandits, some of whom had been forced to flee to the hills by the harsh penalties of the Diaz judiciary. Others were school teachers, small businessmen, or peasant leaders who saw the injustice in Mexican society. These volunteers from diverse backgrounds were united by one aim: to overthrow the Diaz regime. Men like Pancho Villa, Emiliano Zapata, and Pascual Orozco already had armed followers, whose numbers expanded with new volunteers during 1910–11. When Madero crossed the border into northern Mexico on November 19, 1910, he had an army of a few hundred men armed with Winchester repeaters and a few captured rifles. The rebels had no machine guns, and any artillery pieces were primitive homemade guns or American Civil War cannon taken from war memorials. He did have the services, however, of a few hundred foreign, mostly American, volunteers who joined his Army of Liberation. They included several Englishmen and Frenchmen, and the grandson of the great Italian revolutionary Guiseppe Garibaldi. Some of these foreign adventurers had little or no military experience, while others were veterans of conflicts like the Spanish–American War and Boer War.

**In a scene from 1905 that was repeated so many times during the Porfirio era, a Mexican peasant suspect is under guard by Federal soldiers. Although this image is from the early 20th century, the uniforms are still similar to those worn during the mid-19th century when Diaz first came to power. Many Mexican prisoners were killed before they reached jail under the age-old method of being "shot while trying to escape." Those with money could bribe their captors to free them, although this man does not appear to have the necessary funds. (Library of Congress)**

## Madero Comes to Power

It quickly became obvious that the rebels were not going to be able to win a swift victory against the Federal Army. At the battle of Casas Grandes in February 1911, Madero's 600-strong army was defeated by a government force of 1,000 men, losing at least 100 troops. Although the Porfirista army had poor training and morale it had a decisive advantage in machine guns and artillery. Madero was wounded during the battle and his army withdrew to lick its wounds and prepare for the next stage of the revolution.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ARTILLERIA
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1910

**This unusual piece of artillery in service with the Porfirista army in 1910 is a French-made Hotchkiss 37mm automatic cannon. These guns were similar to the pom-pom guns famously used by the Boers during their war against the British in 1901–02. They fired 1lb shells that were fed into the left side of the gun in eight round strips, which gave the gun the appearance of an oversized Hotchkiss machine gun. (Library of Congress)**

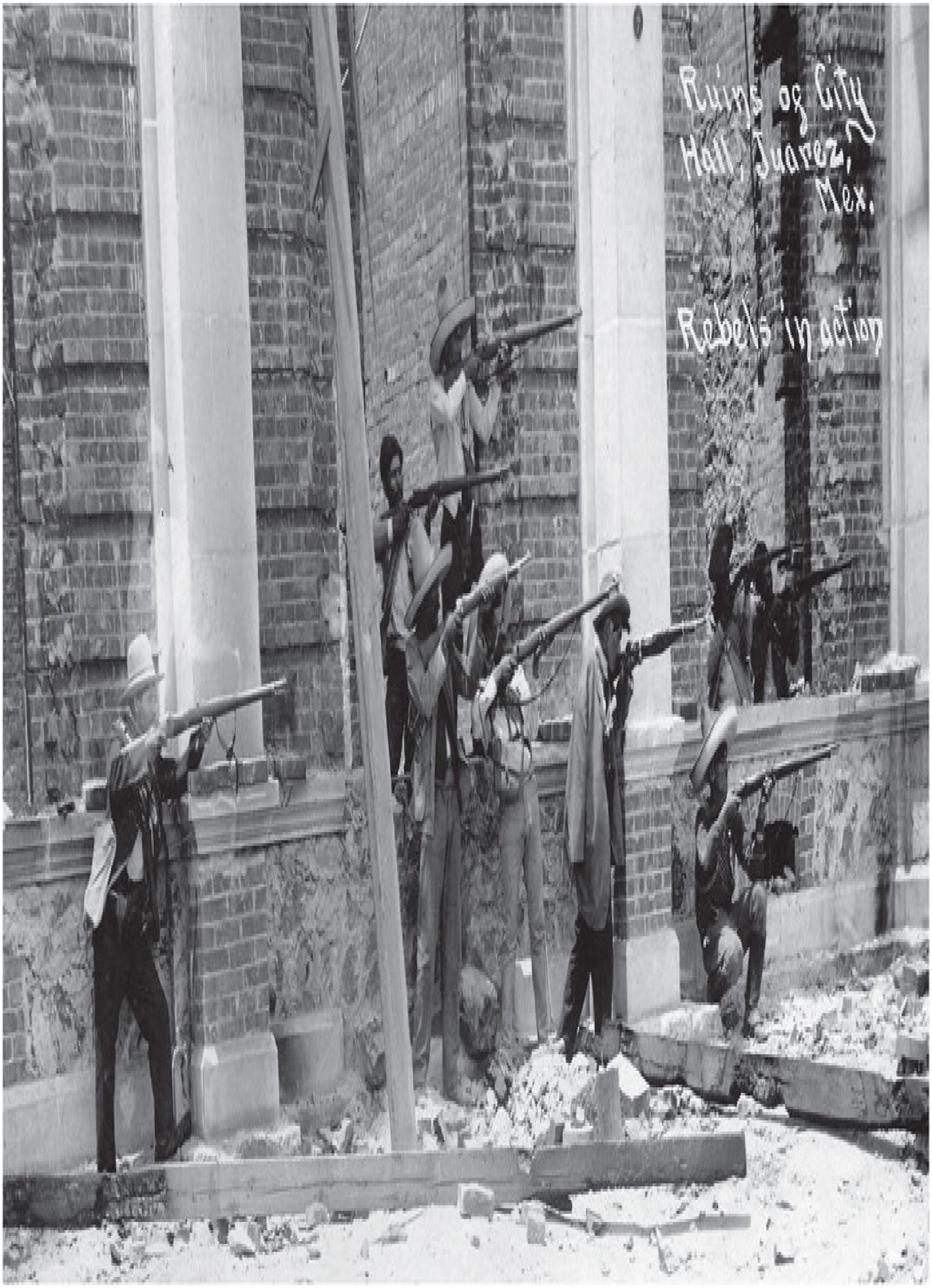
Despite this setback, over the next few months the revolutionary forces continued to grow to a strength of 16,700 fighters spread all over northern and central Mexico. Apart from the forces in northern Mexico under the direct command of Madero, most of these revolutionaries were fighting their own separate campaigns across nine different states. By May 1911 the various rebel armies were wearing the Porfirista army down, and the final blow to Diaz's rule came with the victory of Madero's forces at the battle of Ciudad Juarez. A Maderista force of 3,000, including a large number of foreign volunteers, took the border town from its 800 defenders. A lucky shot from one of Madero's two cannon hit the garrison's water tank and the defenders now faced the prospect of dying of thirst. According to foreign observers, the entire battle was fought at a leisurely pace, with the Maderistas in no rush to capture the town. Its fall on May 10 weakened Diaz's hold on power, and by the 17th he had been persuaded by his advisors and military commanders to resign. He prevaricated for a few days, before finally agreeing to leave office on the 25th. As Diaz and his entourage headed for the port of Veracruz and exile, Francisco Madero was heading by train to Mexico City. On June 7, after a four-day journey, he was greeted by an estimated 250,000 people in the capital. A provisional president, Francisco de la Barra, took office until democratic elections could be held. The next few months of 1911 were troubled, with the supporters of all the various factions jockeying for power in Mexico City. In the countryside, rebels like Emiliano Zapata refused to disarm their men until they had seen some tangible results from their victory over Diaz. Madero was duly elected president but began his term in office surrounded by opposition and difficulties. These included politicians and military officers from the Diaz era as well as many of his former revolutionary supporters. From the moment he took office in October 1911, he faced constant demands to satisfy the various political factions. The land reforms that most revolutionaries had expected to be enacted were never going to be easy, and revolutionaries like Emiliano Zapata soon lost patience with Madero’s apparent inaction. The president was caught between a rock and a hard place. The Federal Army, with no loyalty to Madero, remained in existence alongside the disgruntled fighters of the revolutionary armies, who were being disbanded in large numbers. The fact that their former enemies in the Federal Army kept their rank and pay caused a great deal of resentment. Although politically naïve, Madero had few illusions that many of the politicians and generals who pledged their loyalty to him wouldn’t stab him in the back at the earliest opportunity.

**Posing defiantly for the cameraman, this volunteer of Madero's forces appears to be one of the more experienced revolutionaries in 1911. He is better armed than many of his comrades with his own revolver and a Mauser rifle acquired from a dead Federal soldier. Ammunition does not appear to be a problem, with plenty of spare rounds for his rifle in the bandoliers on his chest. Although he has no uniform, the tricolor ribbon around his hat band shows his allegiance to Madero. (Cody Images)**

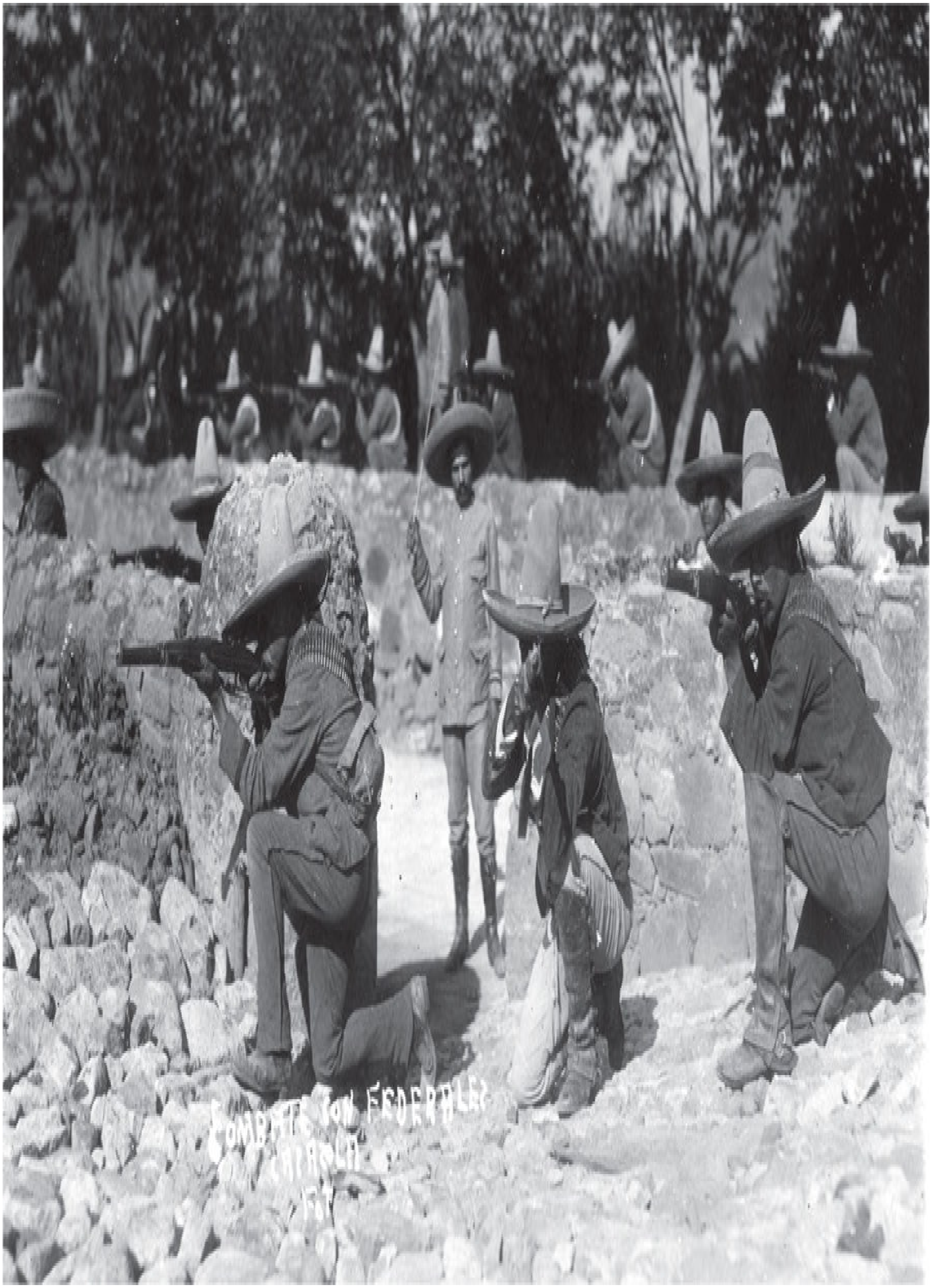
**This group of volunteers of Madero’s Ejercito Liberator are typical of the type of men who overthrew President Diaz. They are a mixture of Mexicans and foreign volunteers who crossed the US–Mexican border to fight for Madero. Although poorly armed and organized, this “amateur” army was still able to defeat the demoralized Porfirista army. Some carry their own repeating carbines, while others have Mausers taken from government troops. In the center of the group is a cannon dating back to at least the American Civil War and probably before that. (Cody Images)**

## The Orozco Rebellion 1912

In March 1912, the former Maderista commander Pascual Orozco began a rebellion against the troubled Madero government. Orozco became disgruntled because, in his eyes, he was yet to receive the credit he deserved for his part in the fall of the Diaz regime. He also shared the resentment of his loyal troops, who had followed him into battle and were now being cast aside by the government. He still had about 8,000 battle-hardened troops under his command in his home state of Chihuahua and decided to take what he felt he deserved by military force. Orozco’s army advanced towards Mexico City, defeating local forces along the march and spreading alarm in the capital. On March 24, a government force of 8,000 troops approached the rebel-held city of Rellano, 850 miles north-west of the capital. Madero’s minister of war, Jose Gonzalez Salas, had decided to take personal command of the government army along with generals Fernando Trucy Aubert and Aureliano Blanquet. The 7,000-strong rebel army was under the command of General Campa, who employed a terrorist weapon in the form of a “Maquino Loco,” or “crazy train.” His men filled an empty train with explosives and then sent it careering at full steam into the government trains that were leading their advance. Only around 80 government troops were killed but the secret weapon shattered the morale of the rest of the army. As his troops retreated, the humiliated minister of war went to his carriage and shot himself. But Orozco failed to take advantage of his army’s victory, spending too much time in his northern stronghold and failing to capitalize on the chaos in the government army. When he eventually sent his elite Colorado cavalry southwards, they were routed at the town of Bermejillo by troops of new army commander Victoriano Huerta. The rebels retreated back to the site of their great victory in March and waited for the advancing government troops. This second battle of Rellano, fought on May 22, resulted in a heavy defeat for Orozco’s troops. He lost 600 men in the battle and, more importantly, lost irreplaceable machine guns and artillery. The victory made General Huerta a hero and effectively ended the rebellion, although the redoubtable Orozco continued to foment further rebellions until he was shot in July 1915.


Ruins og City Hall, Juarez, Mex.
Rebels in action

**Most of the eight Maderistas in this photograph are armed with captured Federal Mauser rifles and carbines taken at the fall of Ciudad Juarez. The men are dressed in the usual rebel garb of civilian clothes, and the man in the center has a “city gent” look about him. He is obviously determined to be in on the action and gamely points his carbine in the direction of the enemy with his one good arm. (Cody Images)**

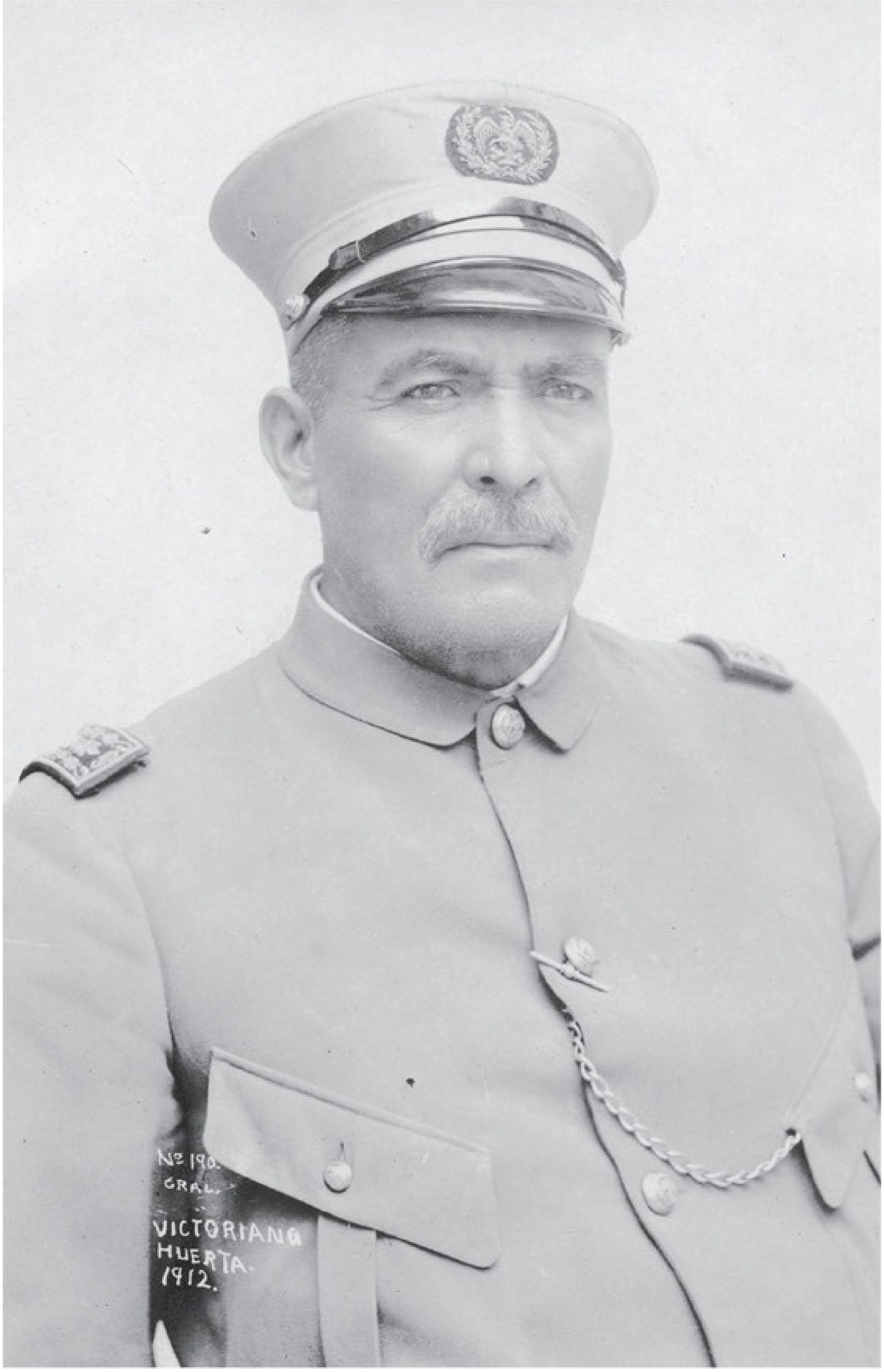

Combate con federales
Casasola
Fot.

**A unit of Federal Government Rurales armed with modern Mauser carbines recreate a shoot-out with rebels in the summer of 1911. Many Rurales were armed with older rolling black carbines during the early stage of the revolution. Their sombreros and jackets are light grey in color and have the metal numeral 8 to denote their unit attached. These rural policemen had been largely responsible for controlling the peasantry during the rule of Porfirio Diaz. (Cody Images)**

**Pancho Villa poses with his small band of Maderista revolutionaries before an attack on the government-held town of Cuidad Juarez in May 1911. Villa's rise from small-time bandit leader before 1910 to commander of the 50,000-strong Division of the North in 1915 was astounding. In 1911 his army was only a few hundred strong but these men were to form the elite of his army, with most serving as officers in his expanding force. Others served in Villa's elite "Dorados" or "Golden Ones" cavalry that acted as his bodyguard. (Cody Images)**

## The Fall of Madero

Although Orozco was defeated, President Madero knew he faced rebellions in several states. He was also well aware that he could not count on the loyalty of many officers and their units in the Federal Army. Although officers like General Huerta protested their loyalty, they were simply biding their time. Madero had been able to depend more on the loyalty of the state militias and the reformed Rurales. The new and loyal Rurales were mostly former soldiers from the pre-1911 Maderista army, but were too few to counter-balance the disloyal Federal Army. The militias suffered as Madero tried to balance the military budget by reducing funding to each state. All the state governors protested about the financial squeeze, and two traveled to Mexico City to plead with Madero. By early 1913, only the state militias of Sonora and Coahuila were large and well-trained enough to defend the Madero government. The final blow came in the form of a right-wing coup d'état. This began on February 9, 1913, when the Conservative supporters of two army officers, Bernardo Reyes and Felix Diaz, struck Mexico City. Diaz was the nephew of the old dictator and had a following amongst businessmen and the pre-1910 elite. The two officers secured the support of some cadets and artillerymen in the capital, as well as small units of cavalry. Reyes was killed in the early fighting but the rebels, known as the "Felicistas" after Felix Diaz, continued to fight. During the artillery exchanges between Felicistas and loyal batteries, large parts of the city center were destroyed. Because of the large number of civilians who were killed in the fighting, the coup became known as the “Ten Tragic Days.” General Victoriano Huerta, Madero’s military commander, then took control, bringing large numbers of troops into Mexico City to restore order. He selected the units brought to the capital carefully, however, to ensure none owed any loyalty to President Madero. Huerta’s plans now became clear and Madero and his brother were arrested for their own “protection,” as well as the vice-president, Jose Maria Pino Suarez. Both of the politicians were forced to resign their offices and were told they would be sent into exile via the port of Veracruz. On February 19, Madero’s brother Gustavo was murdered in cold blood and the former president’s life was now clearly in danger. Two days later, Suarez and Madero shared his fate when they were bundled into a car that had come to take them to safety. Instead they were dragged from the car and shot, supposedly in a firefight with Madero supporters. A day earlier General Huerta had seized power and, representing a return to the pre-revolution military dictatorship, made himself the most unpopular man in Mexico overnight. On February 18, 1913, General Huerta sent a telegram to all 20 state governors of Mexico. He said that, as the president and his cabinet had been imprisoned, he, with the authorization of the senate, was assuming executive powers. All but one governor accepted this without protest and Huerta effectively became dictator of Mexico. The only exception was Venustiano Carranza, governor of Coahuila de Zaragoza State, who as a loyal supporter of Madero had no intention of legitimizing Huerta’s murderous coup.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**General Victoriano Huerta, the half-Indian commander of the Mexican Federal Army, is seen at the time when he defeated the rebel Orozco at the battle of Rellano in 1912. He had served the former president, Diaz, faithfully for many years and had then had pledged his loyalty to President Madero. His loyalty to Madero was doubtful and after fighting broke out in Mexico City in 1913 he launched a coup against him to restore order. Once in power he became a dictator and used the Federal Army to fight against the armies of Villa, Zapata, and Carranza in 1913–14. (Library of Congress)**

**Pascual Orozco, the leader of the Colorado rebel forces against the Madero Government in 1912, stands in the center of some of his followers. Orozco was one of the foremost Maderista leaders during the 1911 revolution but quickly fell out with Madero when he became president. Orozco soon realized that he was never going to be sufficiently rewarded for his part in Madero's victory. He decided to get what he thought he was entitled to by military means and launched his rebellion in March 1912. (Library of Congress)**

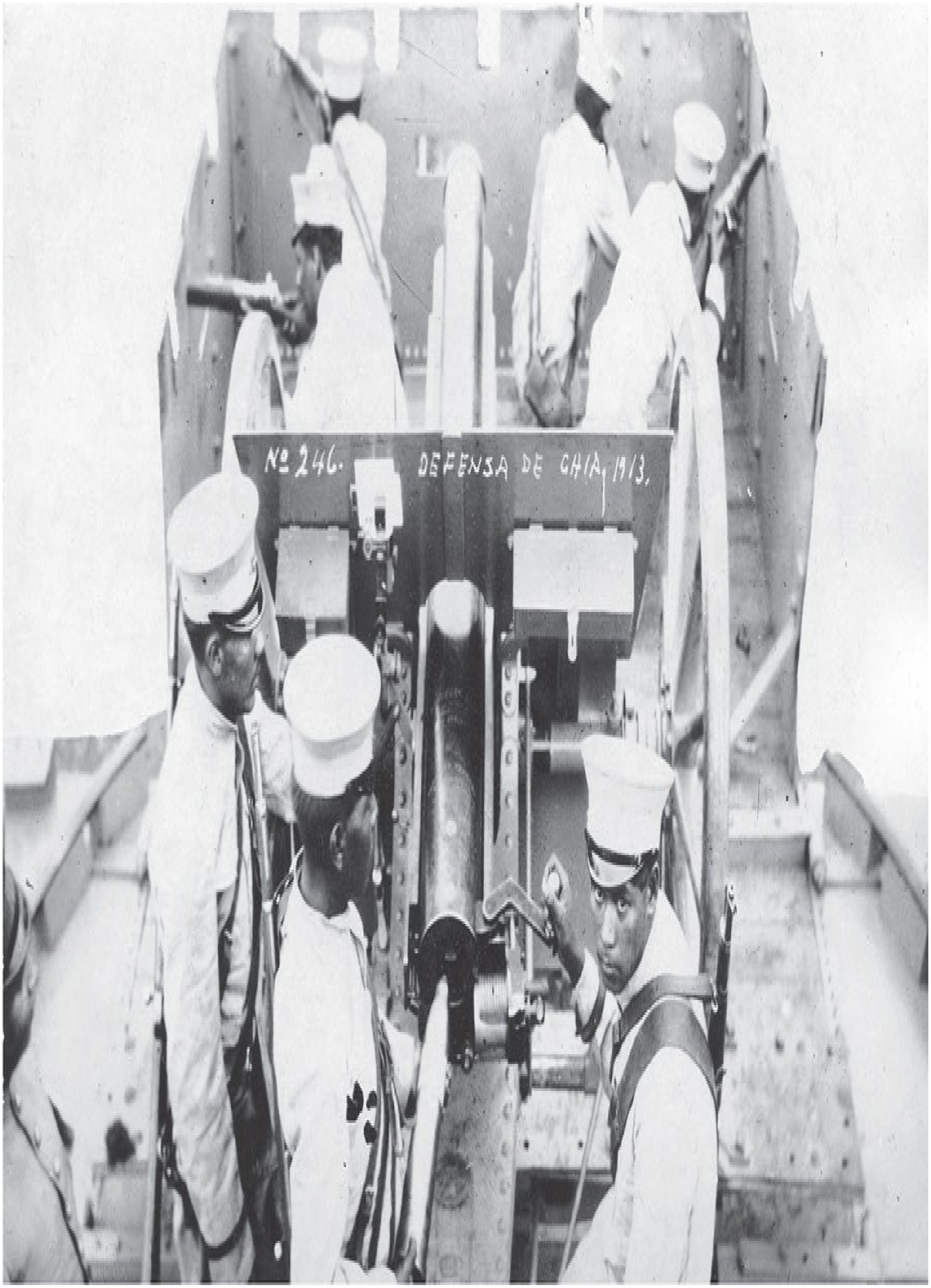
## Huerta's Army

General Victoriano Huerta's hold on power was always going to depend on the size and efficiency of the Federal Army. That his unpopular government survived from February 1913 to August 1914 was essentially because he had the most powerful army. Huerta was obsessed with expanding the army, with an intended target of 250,000 men under arms. In addition to this immense, and unsustainable, army, Huerta wanted to expand the Rurales to 50,000 men. He would spend whatever was necessary, even if it meant bankrupting Mexico. Recruitment drives were constantly underway and youths were press-ganged from dance halls, cinemas, or off the streets. Despite these drastic measures the Federal Army only reached a strength of 125,000 men, and this was purely on paper. In November 1913 Huerta sent messages to all state governors demanding to know how many men they could supply to his army. He wanted to further expand the army to 150,000 in spite of the fact that he did not have enough rifles to arm them. Agents were dispatched to buy Mauser rifles from anyone willing to supply them. The "paper" total of troops was illusory, and a US analyst stated in June 1914 that Huerta's army totaled 60,000 men, with 13,000 garrisoning Mexico City. The capital's garrison was said to have only 3,000 regular troops, with the remainder made up of conscripted students and civil servants. Another 8,000 troops were strung out along the road from the port of Veracruz to Mexico City. The strongest concentrations of Huerta troops were reported to be 6,000 in the state of San Luis Potosi, 6,000 at the city of Aguascalientes, and another 5,000 at Guaymas. In another attempt to increase the number of men under arms, Huerta suggested that every hacienda owner should recruit their own militia to guard their lands. These "Ligas de Defensa Social" volunteers were to protect their employers’ land and fight in support of the Federal Army whenever necessary.

**The French mercenary pilot Didier Masson sits at the controls of the "Sonora," a US Martin biplane which had been converted into an improvised bomber in 1913. It was flown by Masson for the Mexican rebels in the campaigns against Huerta in 1913–14. Its bombs were homemade from 18-inch-long iron pipes and were packed with scrap metal and dynamite. When over the target the bomb aimer would pull a string, which released the bombs with detonators in their noses that would hopefully explode on impact. The "Sonora" was the first bombing aircraft to take part in a conflict in the Western Hemisphere. (Cody Images)**

## Rebels versus "Federales," 1913–14

A disparate alliance of anti-Huerta forces was soon formed, with rebel armies under the command of often rival commanders. A number of these rivals saw themselves as the potential leader of the armed opposition, while others simply wished to topple Huerta. The two most ambitious of the rebel commanders were Pancho Villa, the former bandit turned Maderista commander, and Venustiano Carranza, the governor of Coahuila de Zaragoza State. Carranza was an ambitious politician who had the audacity to declare himself "The Citizen First Chief of the Constitutionalist Army in Charge of the Executive Power of the Union." With only a small force of troops loyal to him personally, Carranza demanded the allegiance of Villa and other rebel leaders. Villa and his so-called "Division of the North," along with other anti-Huerta military groups, reluctantly accepted Carranza's leadership for the time being. Additionally, Carranza gained the loyalty of a number of militia commanders, including, crucially, Alvaro Obregon from Sonora State. The rebels were organized into four large military forces made up of Pancho Villa's Division of the North, Obregon's Army of the North-West, General Pablo Gonzalez's North-East Corps, and General Natera's Central Corps. In the south, the main opposition to Huerta came from the Liberation Army of the South under its leader Emiliano Zapata. Huerta had the support of the pre-1910 establishment and most of the Federal Army, or "Federales." On paper, the rapidly expanding Federal Army with its artillery, machine guns, and a few aircraft should have been more than a match for the disorganized rebels. The Villistas who did the majority of the fighting on the anti-Huerta side were to prove to be the equal of Huerta’s Federal Army. There is no space here to list the many battles, sieges, and skirmishes of the war between Huerta and his enemies. Many of these encounters went largely unreported as rebel troops isolated, surrounded, and defeated a number of Federal garrisons in 1913–14. The main battles of this period took place in the northern half of Mexico, but there were other battles and sieges right across the vast country. Many of these battles involved anything from a few hundred to several thousand fighters in each army, with no quarter given on each side. For much of 1913 the rebels organized, gathered their strength, and seized arms from the Federal Army. By the final months of the year, the rebels were ready to confront the Federales in a series of set-piece battles and sieges that would decide the future of Mexico.


Nº 246. DEFENSA DE CHIA, 1913.

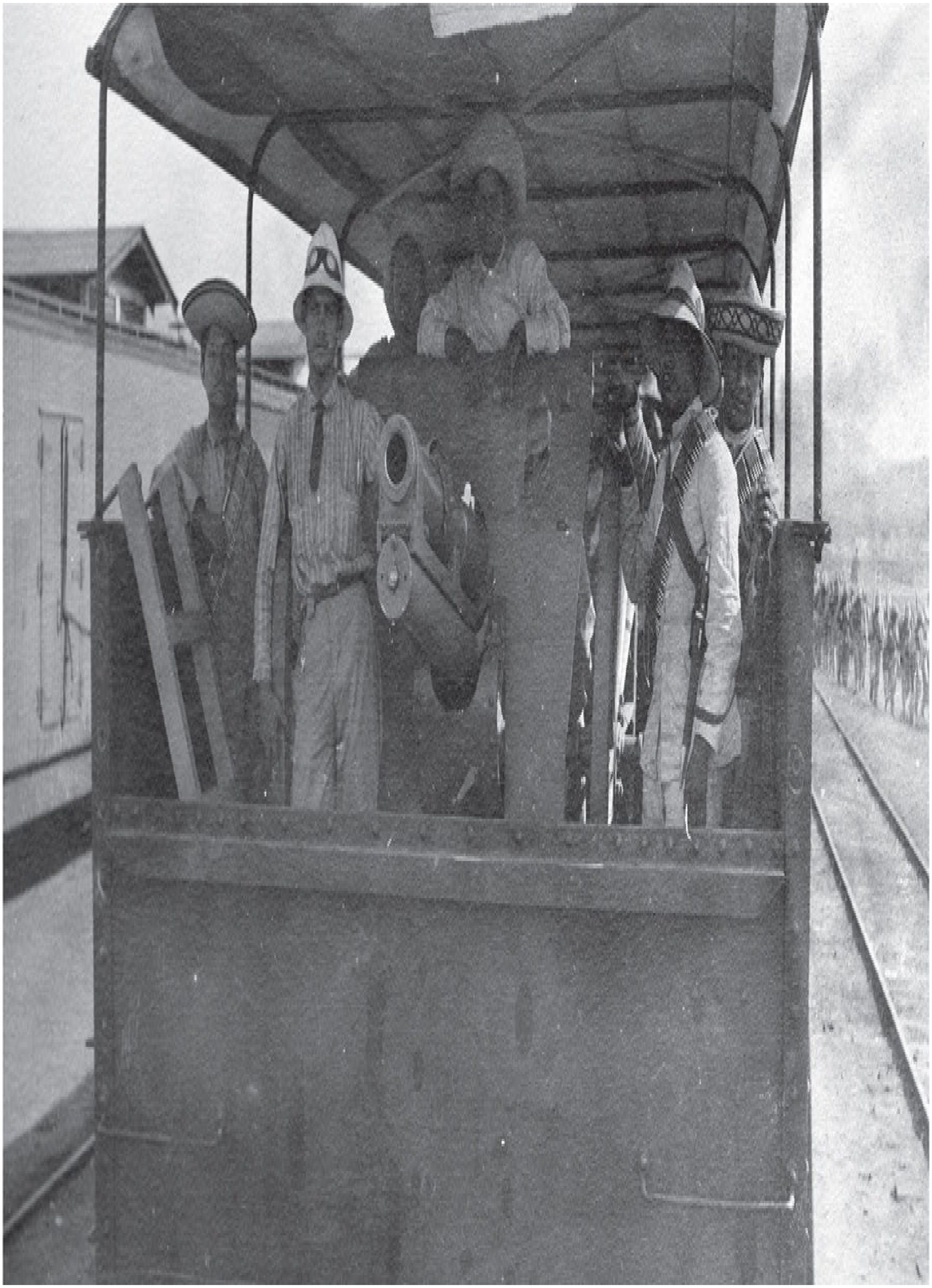
**A Federal Army-manned 75mm field gun is mounted on a partly armored flatbed railway truck with limited protection for the crew. At the back of the truck is a roofed shelter with armor-plated walls and at the front is a three-sided embrasure with cut outs for the men to fire their rifles from. Although not affording the same level of protection for the crew as a fully armored train with totally enclosed carriage for the men, it would certainly be useful, especially if the enemy was at a distance. (Cody Images)**

# Villa’s Victories

During 1913 and 1914, Pancho Villa’s constantly expanding Division of the North outmaneuvered and outfought Huerta’s Federal Army, winning a series of five major battles and a large number of smaller battles and skirmishes in northern Mexico.

## The First Battle of Torreon

One of Villa’s first major victories in his war with Huerta was fought in late September and early October 1913 at the city of Torreon. Torreon was the site of a series of clashes during the 1913–14 campaign because of its strategic importance as a rail junction on the route south into Mexico City. Beginning on September 29, a 8,000-strong Villista force, supported by two field guns, attacked the 3,000-man Federal garrison under General Francisco Murguia. The defense was stiffened by the presence of a number of Pascual Orozco’s Colorados, and by Spanish volunteers and local factory workers. Orozco, who had been defeated by Huerta in 1912, had decided to throw in his lot with his old foe as the only chance of survival for himself and his men. The Colorados were regarded by Villa and the rest of the anti-Huerta forces as traitors and turncoats of the worst kind, and they could expect no mercy if captured. The garrison was outnumbered but was well prepared and had dug in a number of machine guns and 11 field guns. Villista attacks on the defenses were thrown back at first but Murguia realized his men could not hold out for much longer. He ordered an orderly retreat that saw the majority of his men escape from the city, leaving behind a large amount of war booty. The Villistas were overjoyed to capture all the garrison’s field guns, which the defenders had failed to spike before they left. In addition, they captured 40 locomotives left in the city’s rail yard and 400,000 rounds of ammunition. The trains were to provide the rebels with transport for the rest of their campaign against Huerta. Some were armored and fitted with mobile workshops and hospitals by captured rail engineers. These trains allowed the Division of the North to transport thousands of men quickly from one battle to another.



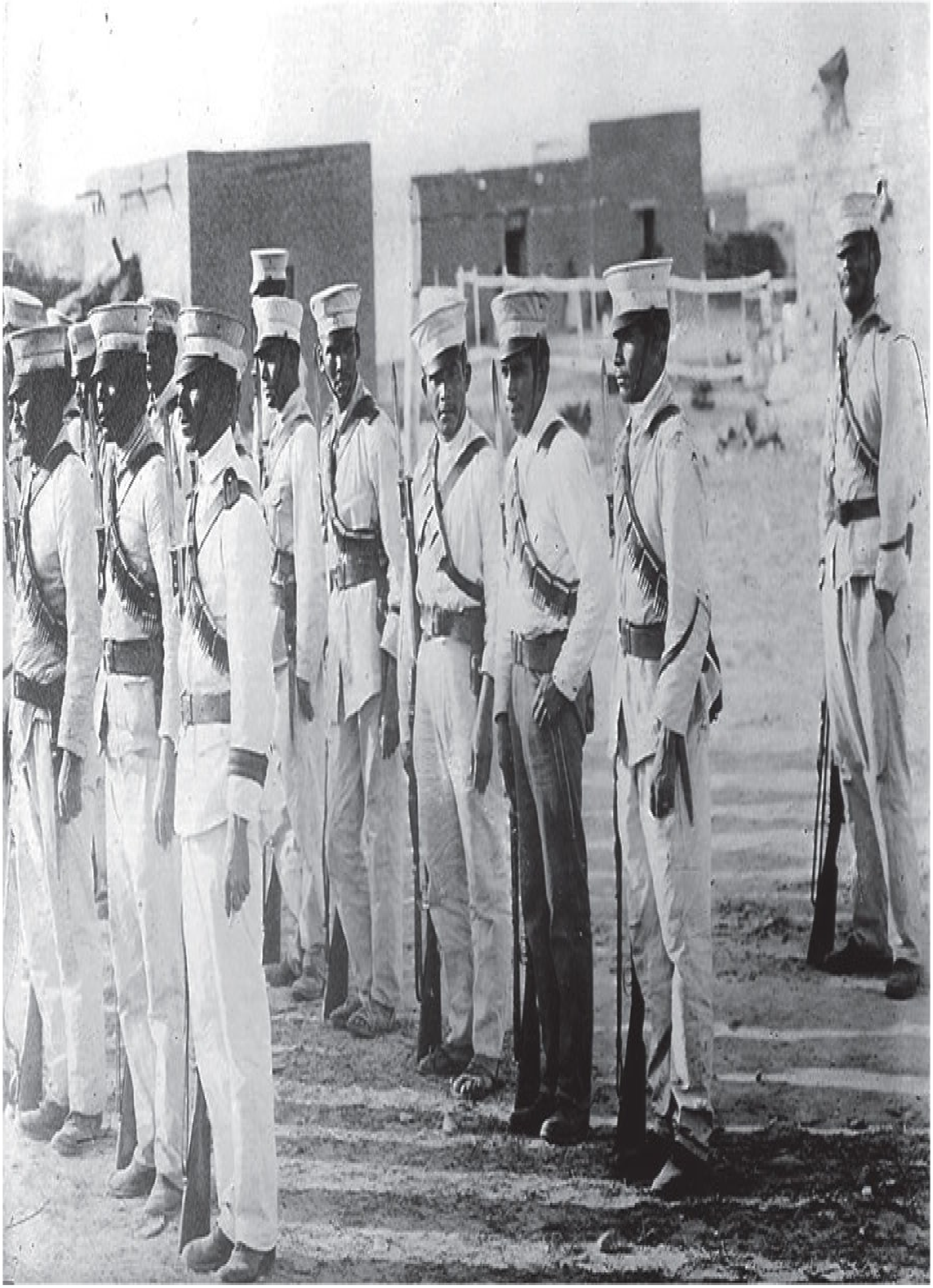
**The railways of northern Mexico were important to all the various armies involved in the 1910–20 fighting. They were used to transport troops from one battlefield to another and were often protected by trucks armed with artillery and machine guns like this one. Some had sleeping cars for the crew and their escort and even hospitals to treat any wounded. This train belongs to the Federal Army of General Huerta and is operating against the Villista rebels in 1913. (Cody Images)**

## The Battle of Tierra Blanca

This battle, between a 7,000-strong Federal force commanded by General Jose Ines Salazar and a 5,500-strong Villista force, took place in the east of Mexico, close to the port of Veracruz. Fighting began on November 23, 1913, with the first day ending in a costly stalemate. On the second day, the Villista commander decided to employ a “Maquino Loco” as used at the second battle of Rellano in 1912. This type of terror weapon became increasingly popular during the Mexican Revolution, because the Federal Army relied on control of the railways of Mexico to transport their troops. According to reports, the “crazy train” was successful in killing a large number of Federal troops. More importantly, it threw the whole defense of Tierra Blanca into confusion, and the attacking Villistas took full advantage. The Federales lost 1,000 dead in the fighting, along with four locomotives, seven machine guns, and all their field guns. Villista losses were reported to be 300 but, crucially, they captured 400,000 rounds of ammunition – a resource they had been desperately short of by the end of the fighting.

## The Battle of Ojinaga

Huerta’s army was in a dire situation by the end of 1913, especially in the northern Mexican states. His remaining forces were holed up in the city of Ojinaga on the US–Mexican border in eastern Chihuahua State. Ojinaga’s garrison of 3,000 troops was under the command of General Salvador Mercado and the turncoat Pascual Orozco. Orozco had also brought the last of his infamous Colorados to the city, and these 2,000 men knew they could expect little mercy from the rebels. The garrison had 18 field guns and a number of machine guns positioned in well-protected fortifications. A rebel force of 3,000 from the Central Corps, under the command of Toribio Ortega and Panfilo Natera, was unable to dislodge the Federales from the fort on December 31. They launched attacks from every direction that were easily dealt with by the defenders. A second attack on January 4, 1914 was again beaten back, with heavy losses on both sides. For once the Federal garrison did not remain in their fortifications, and a cavalry attack by a few hundred men took the Villistas by surprise. Pancho Villa now decided to take matters into his own hands and on January 9 he arrived by train with 1,500 Villista reinforcements. The next day Villa ordered a final attack and this time the defenders broke when a unit leaving its positions to get more ammunition caused panic. After an hour's fighting, the Federal Army broke, with hundreds trying to escape by jumping into the Rio Grande. As was usual, all captured Federal officers and any Colorados were shot out of hand under Villa's supervision. One captured soldier was known to Villa and the two had a brief conversation. Villa's soon-to-be executed acquaintance said, "I know you will have me shot… but if I had one hundred lives, I would use every one to fight against you!" Villa shook the man's hand, gave him back his rifle, and sent him on his way, saying, "I appreciate men like you." The other prisoners did not receive the same treatment and were soon stood against a wall. Villa was annoyed to discover that the Federal troops who had fled across the border were being given shelter by the US authorities. He nevertheless took advantage of his time on the border to replenish supplies and buy new arms from US suppliers.



**Troops of General Huerta who are part of the garrison of the isolated city of Torreon in Coahuila State line up in their defensive positions before battle in March 1914. This particularly brutal battle was to see over 1,000 of these defenders killed and hundreds more taken prisoner. A series of defeats of the Federal Army of Huerta over the next few months would end his ineffective and corrupt rule over Mexico. (Library of Congress)**

## The Second Battle of Torreon

Shortly after Torreon fell to Villa, it was recaptured by Federales under General Velasco. In March 1914, Villa's Division of the North was preparing to seize the city once again and expecting a hard fight. Huerta was well aware of the town's strategic value and had garrisoned it with 10,000 men under the command of General Jose Refugio Velasco. The garrison included the usual stiffening of Colorados and had been fortified to such an extent that Velasco boasted it was impregnable. Before the battle began, the 13,400 Villistas tasked with its capture had been transported to the outskirts by train. This was done in the greatest secrecy, as, if possible, Villa wanted to take the garrison totally by surprise. Inevitably, the movement of a number of trains packed with troops and artillery did not pass unnoticed and the Federales were prepared. Before they could engage the defenses of Torreon proper, the Villistas would have to overcome a fortified hill, "Cerro de la Pila," on the outskirts of the city. The Villista commander, Felipe Angeles, telephoned General Velasco and demanded that he surrender the hill. Velasco refused the request to surrender, not for the last time, and prepared his defenses for the expected attack, which began on March 25. Over the next few days the Villistas launched six failed assaults, as wave after wave of their troops tried to take the hill. A seventh attack finally took Cerro de la Pila, but its conquerors faced a desperate counterattack by Federal troops. The Federales retook the hill but only held it for two hours before losing it again to the Villistas. Despite the fall of Cerro de la Pila, the garrison continued to hold out until April 2, when, under cover of a dust storm, Velasco and 6,000 men escaped from the city to the east. Villa now had Mexico City at his mercy but Carranza ordered him to pursue the fleeing Federal Army. Velasco and his men fought a number of rearguard actions over the next few days but on the 12th the survivors were defeated at the battle of San Pedro.

**A 75mm field gun of the Federal Army desperately fires in the defense of Torreon in late March 1914. The Federal Army garrison of 8,200 men had 29 guns to defend the city with and held out for five days. When they withdrew, they managed to take all of their field guns with them using the cover of a dust storm. Their withdrawal had been well organized by their commander, General Velasco, one of Huerta's more capable officers. (Library of Congress)**

**A 75mm field gun of Pancho Villa’s Division of the North is sited to bombard the Federal-held town of Torreon in March 1914. The Villistas had captured large numbers of modern artillery pieces from the Federal Army in earlier victories. Villa was fortunate to have one of the best ex-Federal Army officers in charge of his artillery, Felipe Angeles. Angeles had one of the best military minds in Mexico and it was unfortunate for Villa and his fortunes that he did not always listen to his advice. (Library of Congress)**

## The Battle of Zacatecas

One of the bloodiest battles of the Mexican Revolution took place on June 22, 1914 when an army of 20,000 Villistas attacked the city of Zacatecas with its population of 30,000. The Federal garrison of the city was 12,000 men, dug in with trenches, barbed wire, and corrugated iron fortifications. Carranza had tried to prevent Villa from capturing the city, which would give him another victory, only enhancing his already legendary status. Zacatecas was an important railway junction, possession of which was the key to Mexico City. The garrison were under pain of death from Huerta to defend it to the last man, as its fall would virtually seal his regime’s fate. Its garrison included a large number of desperate men, including several thousand of the hated Colorados, who knew, if defeated, they would receive no quarter from Villa’s troops. The four hills around the city – “Sierpe,” “Loreto,” “La Buf” and “El Grillo” – were key to the city’s defense. The Federal commander, General Barron, had ensured that La Bufa and El Grillo had been heavily fortified. Barron set up his command post on the top of La Bufa – a demonstration of his determination to fight to the last. The battle began with a long bombardment by Villa’s field guns, just purchased from US suppliers with the agreement of the US Government. The fighting now centered around the two fortified hills, and, after several assaults, El Grillo fell to the Villistas at 1.00pm. La Bufa held out for a few hours more, its defenders spurred on by their commander, but its fall ended the battle. Large numbers of Federal troops now fled down the only available road out of the city, straight into a horrific trap. Waiting for them were 7,000 fresh Villista troops, placed there to block their retreat, and a terrible massacre ensued. According to eyewitnesses, the “hills flowed with blood and corpses were piled up by the side of the road.” Any officers who fell into Villista hands were shot after the battle along with captured

Colorados. As was usual, most Colorados preferred to die fighting, knowing the best they could expect was a bullet if they surrendered. General Barron did escape, straggling into the city of Aguacalientes with 300 survivors.

**Federal troops of General Huerta’s army practice with their Maxim heavy machine gun mounted on the footplate of a government train in 1914. By this time, Huerta and his troops were on the verge of collapse after a series of disastrous defeats at the hands of Pancho Villa’s Division of the North. All of the gun crew are wearing the cork sun helmet, which was in widespread use with the Federal Army. One man has car goggles, which were worn by many soldiers to protect their eyes from the desert sand. (Author’s Collection)**

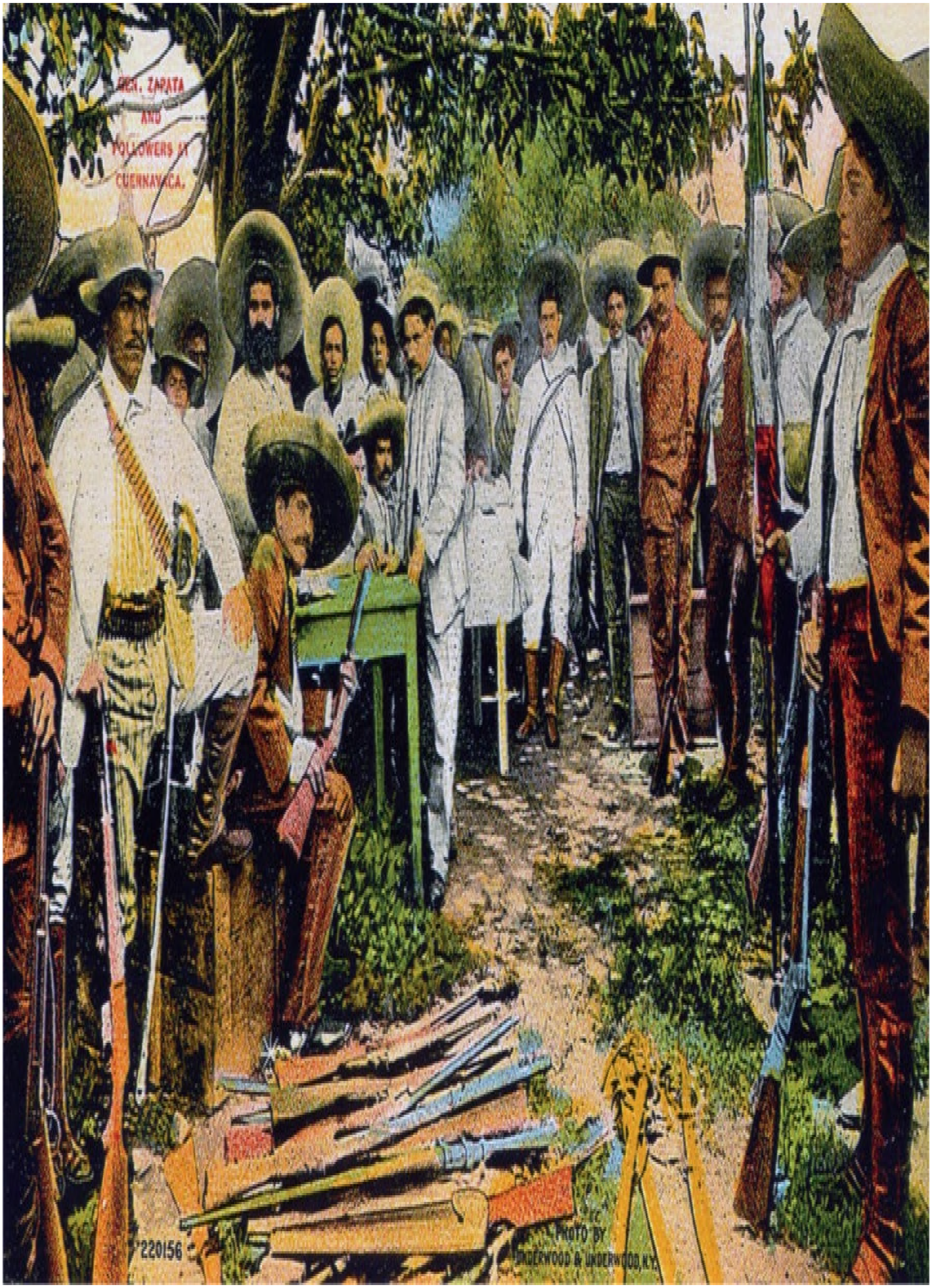

GEN. ZAPATA AND FOLLOWERS IN CUERNAVACA.
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PHOTO BY UNDERWOOD & UNDERWOOD, N.Y.

**Sitting at the table, Emiliano Zapata briefs his commanders surrounded by men from his bodyguard. Zapata led the Liberation Army of the South with the support of a number of “generals,” who usually commanded their own retinues of a few hundred men. A general in Zapata’s loosely organized army was any commander who had at least 50 men. The men of his bodyguard are armed with the usual Zapatista mix of older and non-standard weaponry. Here the man in the right foreground has a rather out-of-date Remington rolling block carbine and the man on the left a more modern Winchester Model 05. (Cody Images)**

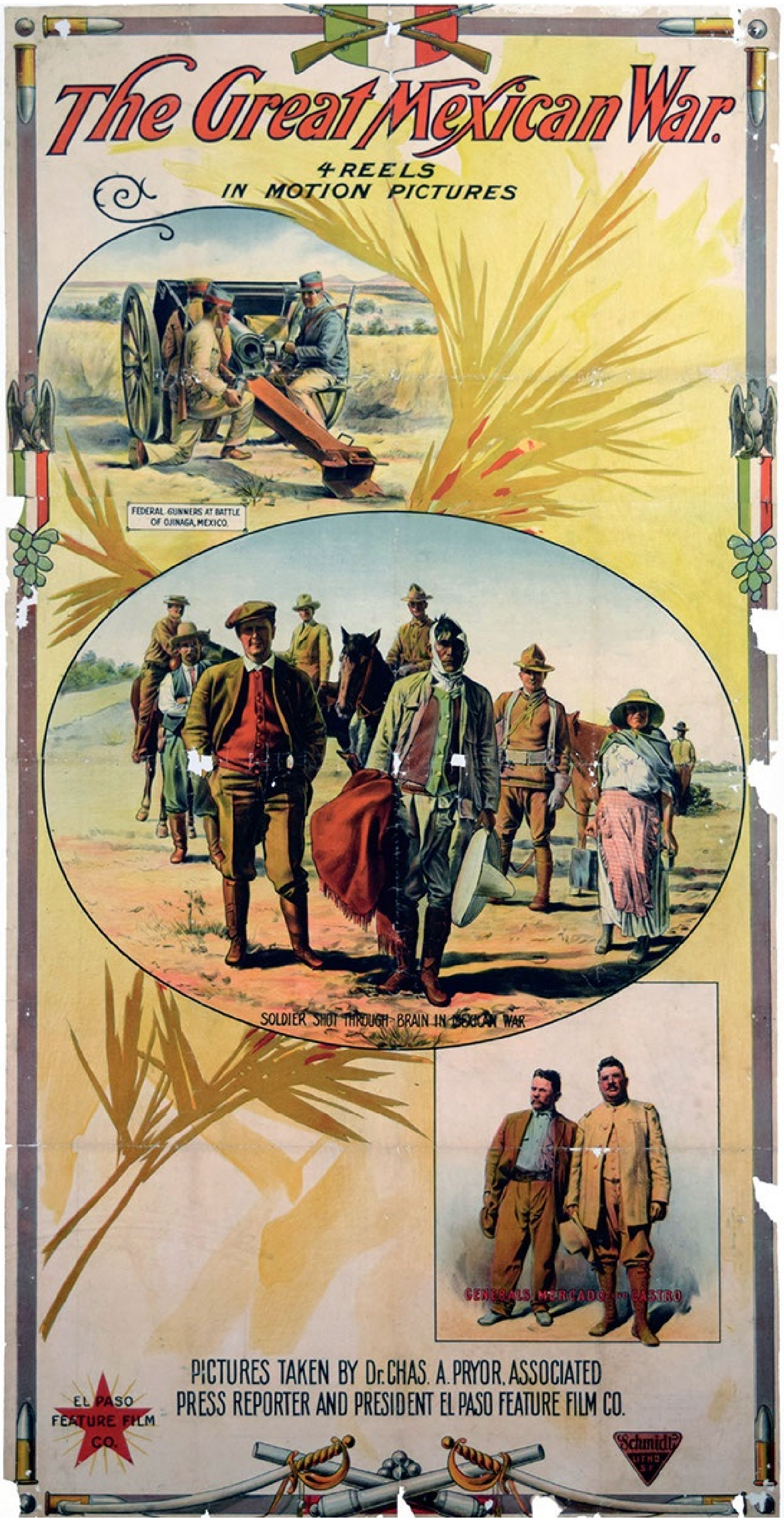
## Obregon’s Victories 1913–14

While Villa was carrying all before him in the north, General Alvaro Obregon and his North-West Corps also won a series of victories against the Federal Army. Although less experienced than Villa, Obregon soon proved himself to be an astute commander. He read reports from the Balkan Wars and, after August 1914, from the Western Front in Europe, learning to command large formations of troops in the field. On March 14, 1913, his forces captured the border town of Nogales, followed by a month later by Naco. On May 11, he won a further victory at Santa Rosa, and, in June, won an 11-day battle for the city of Santa Maria, which fell on the 26th. He then decided to extend his military campaign southwards into Sinaloa State, where he fought for the next eight months. From March 1914, Obregon campaigned in Sinaloa and Nayarit states and defeated the main Federal Army in the west of Mexico in battles fought on three consecutive days in July at La Venta on the 6th, Orendain on the 7th, and El Castillo on the 8th. These victories netted Obregon 5,000 prisoners, 16 field guns, and a large number of machine guns, as well as 18 trains and 500,000 pesos of much-needed funds. By the end of the campaign against Huerta, the army of Obregon had been transformed from a group of militia units into a professional force. Obregon had learned numerous lessons during the campaign, even acquiring some of the first aircraft used in the Mexican Revolution. He would prove to be a formidable rival for his so-called ally, Villa, when the political situation changed in late 1914 and 1915.

**A young Zapatista cavalryman poses proudly with his old-fashioned carbine while on campaign against Huerta's Federal Army. Zapata's troops were always the poor relations when it came to armaments, compared to their allies, the Villistas. They did not have access to the US border, from where Pancho Villa bought the vast majority of his guns and ammunition. This young man is lucky enough to have a number of spare clips for his gun but would still need to capture more from the Federal Army when the fighting began. (Cody Images)**

## Huerta Defeated, 1914

While Villa was reducing the last of the Federal garrisons in northern Mexico and Obregon was winning his victories in the north-west, other rebel forces were also in action. In the north-east, General Gonzalez, although not as effective a commander as Villa or Obregon, was also taking territory from the Federales. In April 1914, his troops of the North-East Corps took the city of Monterey, and in May, the port of Tampico. Even a man as stubborn as Victoriano Huerta could see that he could not hope to win the war. The rebel forces were growing while the Federal Army shrank, many of its troops deserting. He decided to resign on July 15 and departed Mexico with a few followers, leaving his deserted generals to strike a deal with the rebel leaders. On August 13, 1914, rebel General Obregon accepted the surrender of the Federal Army at Teolyucan on the outskirts of Mexico City. The Federal commander, General Gustavo Salas, signed the document, which effectively ended the army's existence, resting on the fender of his staff car.



# The Great Mexican War.

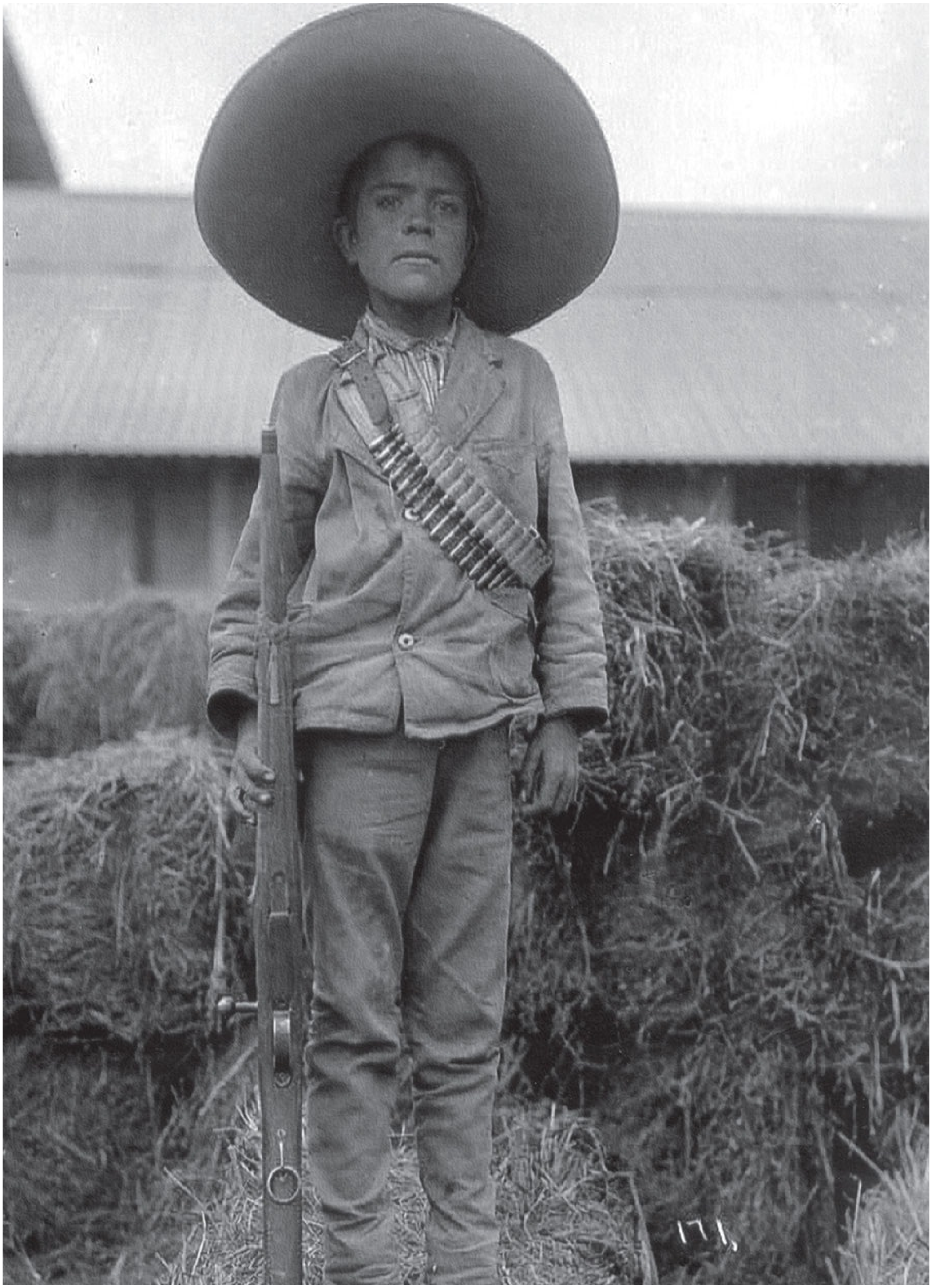
4 REELS
IN MOTION PICTURES

FEDERAL GUNNERS AT BATTLE OF OJINAGA, MEXICO.
SOLDIER SHOT THROUGH BRAIN IN MEXICAN WAR
GENERALS MERCADO AND CASTRO
EL PASO FEATURE FILM CO.
Schmidt LITHO S.F.

PICTURES TAKEN BY Dr. CHAS. A. PRYOR, ASSOCIATED
PRESS REPORTER AND PRESIDENT EL PASO FEATURE FILM CO.

**This foyer poster advertises the four-reel film “The Great Mexican War,” produced by the El Paso Feature Film Company. Several local companies sent their crews over the border into Mexico to film battles for the amusement of the US public. They were a cheap if dangerous way of entertaining people with live battle scenes and gory details like “Soldier Shot Through the Brain.” Mexican military leaders like Pancho Villa would be paid for permission to film the battles and skirmishes of the revolution. (Cody Images)**

# MEXICO IN TURMOIL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**A young soldier of one of the rebel factions during the Mexican Revolution poses proudly with his Mauser carbine. Boy soldiers were employed in large numbers by Mexican armies for much of the 1910–20 period. They could expect little consideration when it came to their age, as one unit of boy soldiers found out to their costs. In 1912 a 60-strong unit of Federal boy soldiers were captured, with their ages ranging from 17 years old down to only 11 years old. Their captors divided them up into four sections of 15 boys and then stood them all up against a wall and shot them without mercy. (Library of Congress)**

## Revolutionary Fallout

The defeat of Huerta and his Federal Army in August 1914 did not bring peace to Mexico. Instead, new rival factions emerged, the victorious revolutionary armies soon falling out amongst themselves as they struggled for control of Mexico. A loose alliance between Villa’s Division of the North and Zapata’s Liberation Army of the South held, but they seldom co-operated militarily. Villa’s and Zapata’s troops fought under the banner of “Conventionalists,” named after the Convention of Agua Calientes in October 1914. This meeting, which lasted into November, saw the two rebel leaders declare war on Carranza and his “Constitutionalist Army” – so named as Carranza claimed to be the upholder of the constitution and the “true” successor to Madero and his Liberal politics. While Villa and Zapata held Mexico City, Carranza and his supporters controlled the port of Veracruz. Carranza’s political existence was precarious, as he did not have the sort of military forces available to Villa and Zapata. His presumptuous claim to be the leader of all opposition to Huerta had made him unpopular with most other anti-Huerta politicians and military commanders. Men like Pancho Villa obeyed Carranza’s orders, at least until their common enemy Huerta was defeated, but did so reluctantly. The fall of Huerta in July 1914 changed everything, and Villa, along with others, began to actively campaign against Carranza. When, in August, Carranza took the presidency for himself, the gloves were off as far as Villa was concerned. He declared war on

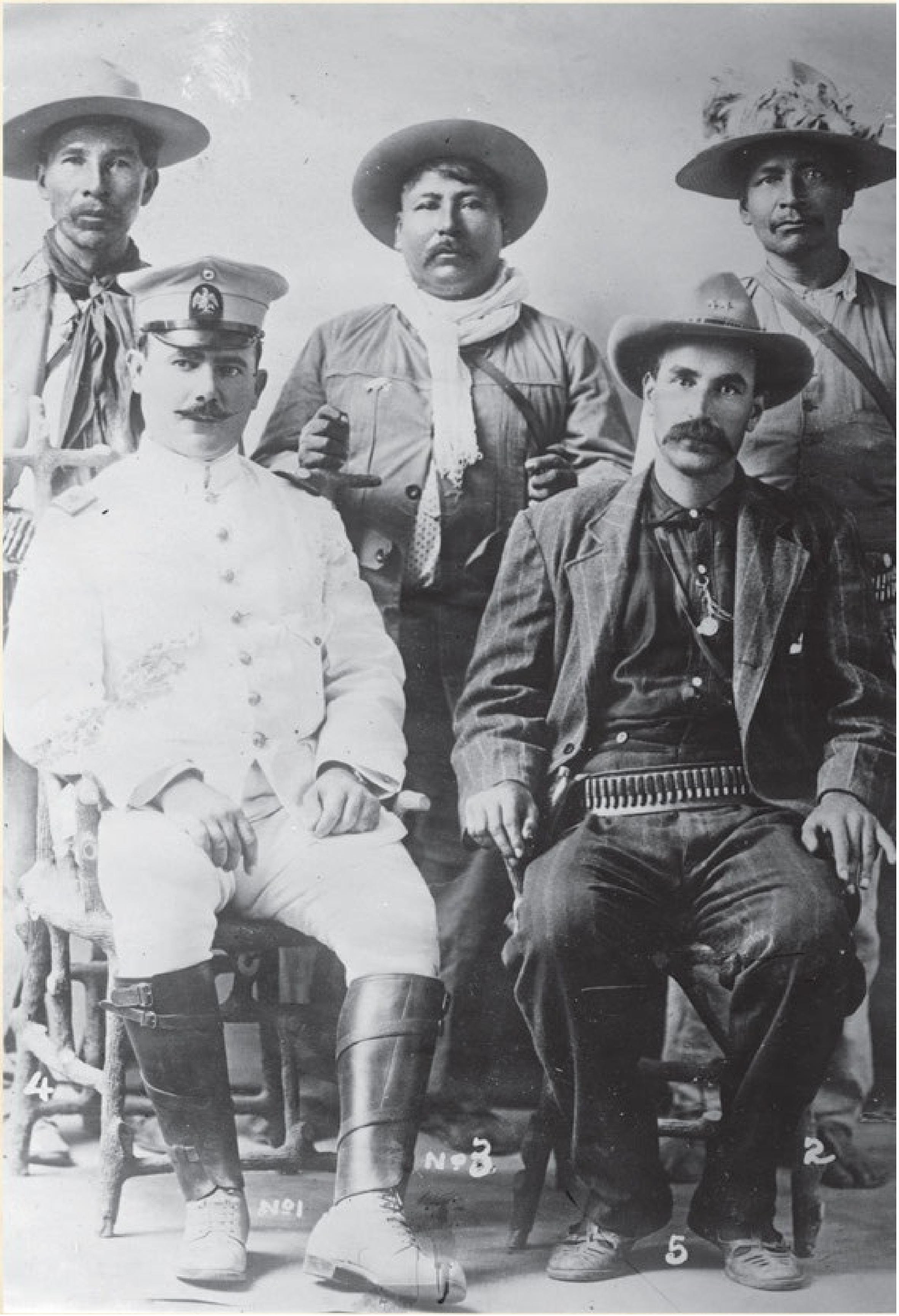
Carranza and began preparing for the inevitable showdown with his erstwhile ally. By January 1915, armed clashes between the Villistas, Zapatistas, and Carranza's Constitutionalist Army had begun in earnest. The future of Mexico would now be decided in battle between Villista's "Division of the North" and the rapidly expanding Constitutionalist Army. In the meantime, Zapata and his forces, while officially supporting Villa, were content to wait and see what happened.

## 1915 – The Year of Decisive Battles

1915 began with two new rivals fighting for control of Mexico, Pancho Villa and his Division of the North and Carranza and his Constitutionalist Army. In January, Villa won the first serious encounter between the two armies when his troops captured the city of Monterey from the Constitutionalists. In mid-January, two Constitutionalist generals, Murguia and Dieguez, took the Villista-held city of Guadalajara, the second largest in Mexico. A large part of the Division of the North was sent to recapture the city, which it did on February 12. For the next few months the two armies wrestled for control of northern Mexico, with several victories for Villa pumping up his already inflated confidence. After one victory over the Constitutionalists, he is reported to have said to one of his generals, "You see Senor General, these Carrancistas flee at the jingle of my spurs." Villa's main antagonist, General Alvaro Obregon, had become a student of the rebel general and knew he could turn his confidence against him. By April, Obregon and his Army of Operations was ready and waiting at the city of Celaya to begin a series of battles for the future of Mexico.

**The Division of the North, or the “Villista Army,” had begun life as a band of bandits in the northern Mexican state of Chihuahua. It consisted of a few dozen men commanded by local desperado turned revolutionary Pancho Villa. His 28-strong band supported anyone who was anti-Diaz in 1910 and grew to a 500-strong pro-Madero army. After fighting on the side of Madero, Villa’s men were absorbed into the new government army along with other revolutionary forces. When President Madero was overthrown and murdered by General Huerta in 1913, Villa and his newly named “Division of the North” constituted the main anti-Huerta military force. When they began their campaign against the dictator that year, the Division of the North had grown to 3,000 men. During the 1913–14 fighting it expanded rapidly and by the time of Huerta’s defeat was about 40,000-strong. Although there was always a strong cavalry element in the division, it also had a large number of artillery pieces and machine guns, mainly captured from the Federal Army. Within its cavalry force was an elite group known as the “Dorados,” or “Golden Ones,” who served as Villa’s bodyguard as well as the vanguard in every Villista attack. When the Division went to war with the Constitutionalist Army in 1915, it could reportedly call on 60,000 troops spread all over northern Mexico.**

**Venustiano Carranza had few troops to call upon when he made the decision to declare himself the defacto leader of the anti-Huerta forces. In theory the forces of Villa, Zapata, and a host of other revolutionary generals were at his disposal in 1913, but few truly supported him. When Madero was overthrown, the troops loyal to Carranza were made up of a few militia units under the command of mostly amateur generals like Benjamin Hill and Alvaro Obregon. By 1914 he had managed to build this patchwork of different military formations into the 57,000-strong Constitutionalist Army. Recruits were drawn from a variety of sources, including the Indian Yaqui population and from the ranks of the industrial factory workers. The army’s principal commander, General Obregon, and his generals had to create a new type of army, which, in theory at least, was loyal first and foremost to Mexico. This army would depend on sound training and not on the dominant personalities of macho commanders like Pancho Villa and Emiliano Zapata. Although some soldiers were veterans of the 1910–14 fighting, many more were young raw recruits. During 1914, a series of training camps improved the performance of the Constitutionalist troops, especially in the use of machine guns and artillery. When the decisive battles of 1915 came, most Constitutionalist soldiers proved themselves to be the equal of their enemies. They were fortunate to be commanded by General Obregon, who was to prove a superior strategist to Villa. Obregon was a thinking general, who, from the start, realized the weaknesses of the previously all-victorious Division of the North and its leader. By 1916, the original band of a few thousand militia had grown into an 80,000-man army that was effectively the national army of Mexico.**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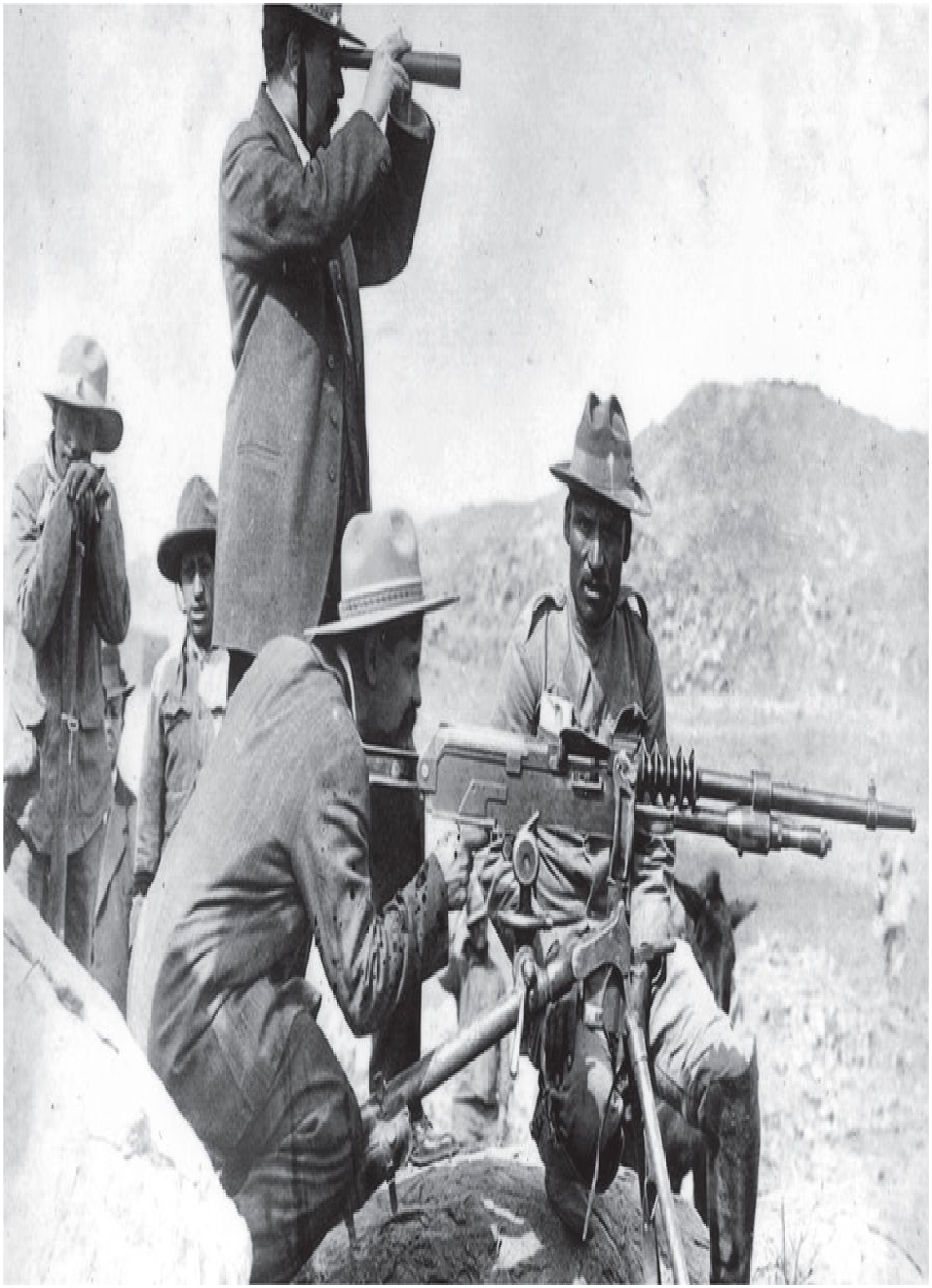
**General Alvaro Obregon, the Constitutionalist Army commander and arch enemy of Villa, poses in a photograph studio with some of his sub-commanders before the battle of Leon in June 1915. During that battle he was to lose his right arm, and had to be restrained from shooting himself by his staff officers. Behind the general are three Yaqui Indian officers whose troops he was to rely heavily on during the war against Villa. (Library of Congress)**



**Pancho Villa examines a Hotchkiss M1914 machine gun which has been recently added to his armory. Villa was always trying to acquire new weapons from whatever source he could, whether from across the US border or from Federal Army captures. Machine guns like this were to be his army’s undoing when they were employed in large numbers against his cavalry in 1915. (Cody Images)**

## The Two Battles of Celaya – April 1915

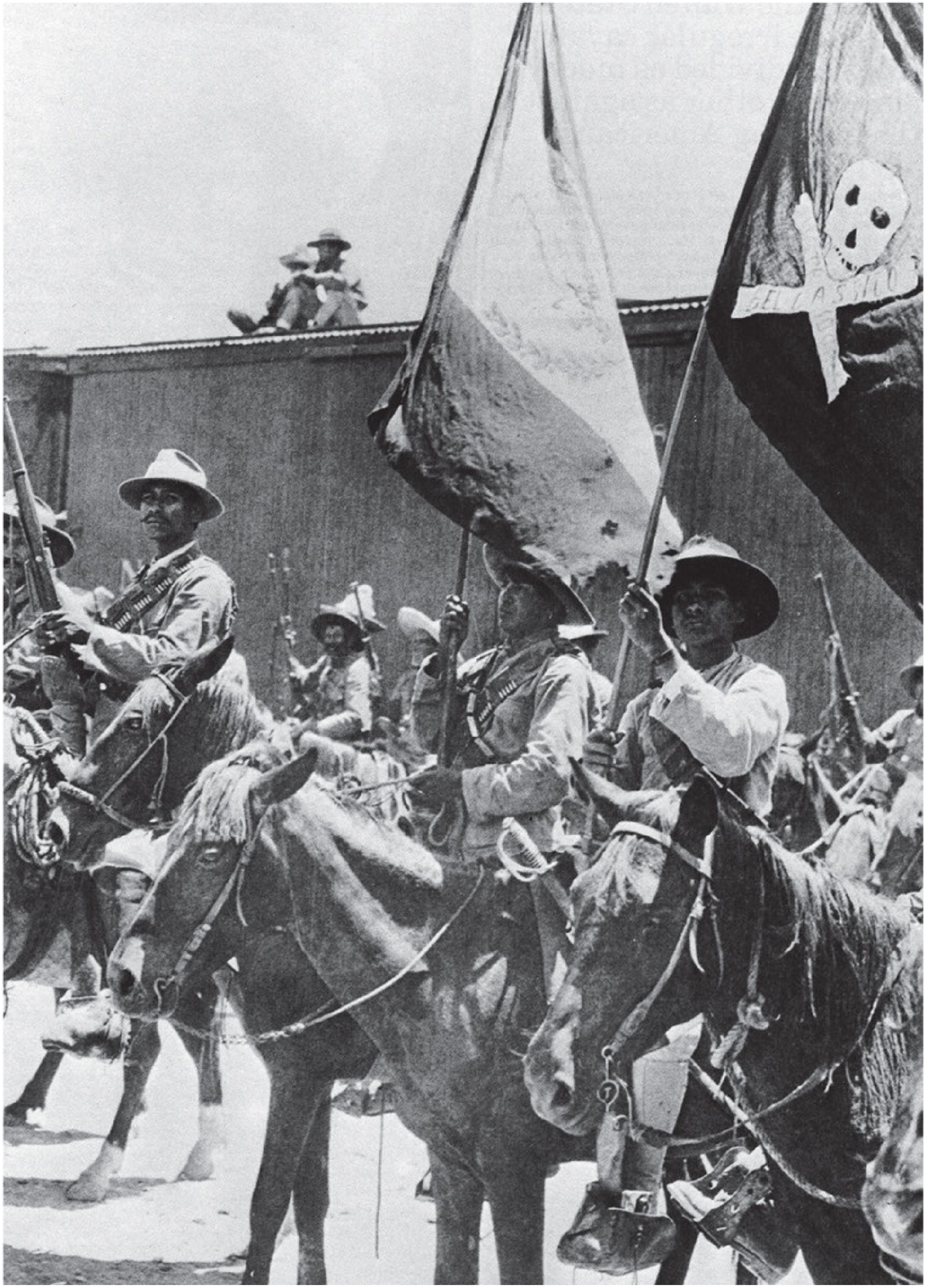
Two of the most decisive battles of the Mexican Revolution were now fought at a town called Celaya, 150 miles north-west of Mexico City. The town, with its 25,000 inhabitants, was garrisoned by the Constitutionalist Army of Operations under the command of General Alvaro Obregon. He was an effective general who, although not a professional, had studied military history and had studied his opponent in 1915, Pancho Villa.

Obregon was well aware of how Villa had won most of his victories in 1913 and 1914 with unstoppable cavalry charges. Having also studied the early fighting in the war in Europe, he knew that cavalry was useless against well-dug-in machine gunners and riflemen. The 11,000 men of his Constitutionalist Army of Operations had dug in around the town and prepared trenches. These were protected with plenty of barbed wire and 86 precious heavy machine guns. There were also 15 field guns, which were sited with the machine guns to create killing zones for Villa’s cavalry. Villa’s 12,000 men advanced toward Celaya in early April, with their usual confidence and with little respect for the “effeminate” Obregon and his troops. Villa’s more astute commanders like Felipe Angeles warned him that taking the town by frontal assault would be too costly. Villa ignored their advice and scoffed at their warnings that the Division of the North was short of ammunition. He said that there was plenty of arms and ammunition in Celaya, which his victorious troops would soon capture. Villa had some cause for confidence, with his battle-hardened veterans and a 4:1 superiority in artillery. Obregon was confident that Villa would not attack his vulnerable lines of communication but would, instead, take the bait and assault the town. Villa’s arrogance had infected his men, especially his elite Dorados cavalry, who had only tasted victory. The battle began with a bombardment by Villa’s 60 guns that devastated some of Obregon’s exposed and “expendable” Yaqui Indian troops. A Constitutionalist attack to cut the railway line behind the Villista forces was then heavily defeated, giving Villa the advantage. Obregon wanted Villa to attack his well-prepared positions at Celaya, so moved towards the Villistas in one of his army’s trains to try and provoke them. This ruse worked and the Division of the North took the bait, beginning an all-out assault on the Constitutionalists’ lines. Repeated cavalry charges now followed, with the Villistas inflicting heavy casualties on Obregon’s troops but suffering heavily themselves. For three days, Villa’s elite cavalry made numerous charges against the well-dug-in machine guns. Villa’s famous Dorados were cut to pieces in front of the Constitutionalist positions in what was described as the bloodiest battle in Mexican history. Still confident, Villa continued to bring up more troops, only for them to suffer the same fate. He refused to accept that for once his “macho” tactics had failed, and he continued to order “one more charge.” After 38 hours of constant fighting, Villa’s men were exhausted and their losses crippling. By April 7, their ammunition was running low and, unable to replenish their stocks from Constitutionalist supplies, they began a disciplined withdrawal back to their base at Irapuato with their morale intact, despite their heavy defeat. Pancho Villa issued orders by telegram to commanders in outlying areas to bring their men to Celaya for the second round of the deadly contest.

The second battle for Celaya began six days after the first had ended, as the Villista army, now reinforced to 20,000, advanced against the town. Obregon had also reinforced his garrison and had 15,000 men, including several “crack” units of his best troops that had been held in reserve. These included the disciplined “Red Battalions” recruited from amongst the industrial workers of the larger cities. Crucially, he had also been able to bring more machine guns into the town and had strengthened the defenses with more barbed wire. The Constitutionalists also kept a force of 6,000 cavalry in reserve, ready to exploit the defeat of the Villistas, who were expected to employ their usual tactics. When Villa arrived at Celaya on April 13, he sent Obregon provocative messages in an attempt to taunt him into fighting him in the open rather than from the protection of his trenches. Obregon treated Villa’s messages with disdain and hoped that his opponent would react in the usual “macho” way. Villa duly obliged, sending in wave after wave of cavalry attacks against the well-dug-in defenders. The Constitutionalist troops now had a new confidence, having defeated the Villistas a week before. Villa’s artillery was reported to be less effective during the second battle and the defenders were better dug-in than in the earlier fighting. On the 14th, Villa ordered a large-scale attack by his infantry, as his cavalry were totally exhausted.

This attack was hampered by torrential rain, in addition to the steady fire of Obregon’s machine guns. The next day, Obregon ordered the coup de grâce, launching his 6,000 fresh cavalry against the now totally exhausted Villistas. Villa realized it would be wise to withdraw his still formidable forces northwards to regroup for the next round with Obregon. They were allowed to retreat, with little interference from the equally exhausted Constitutionalists. As the Division of the North headed north towards the city of Leon, it left behind thousands of dead and wounded. The Villistas lost around 4,000 dead and 6,000 prisoners, with the Constitutionalists also seizing 32 cannon and 5,000 rifles.

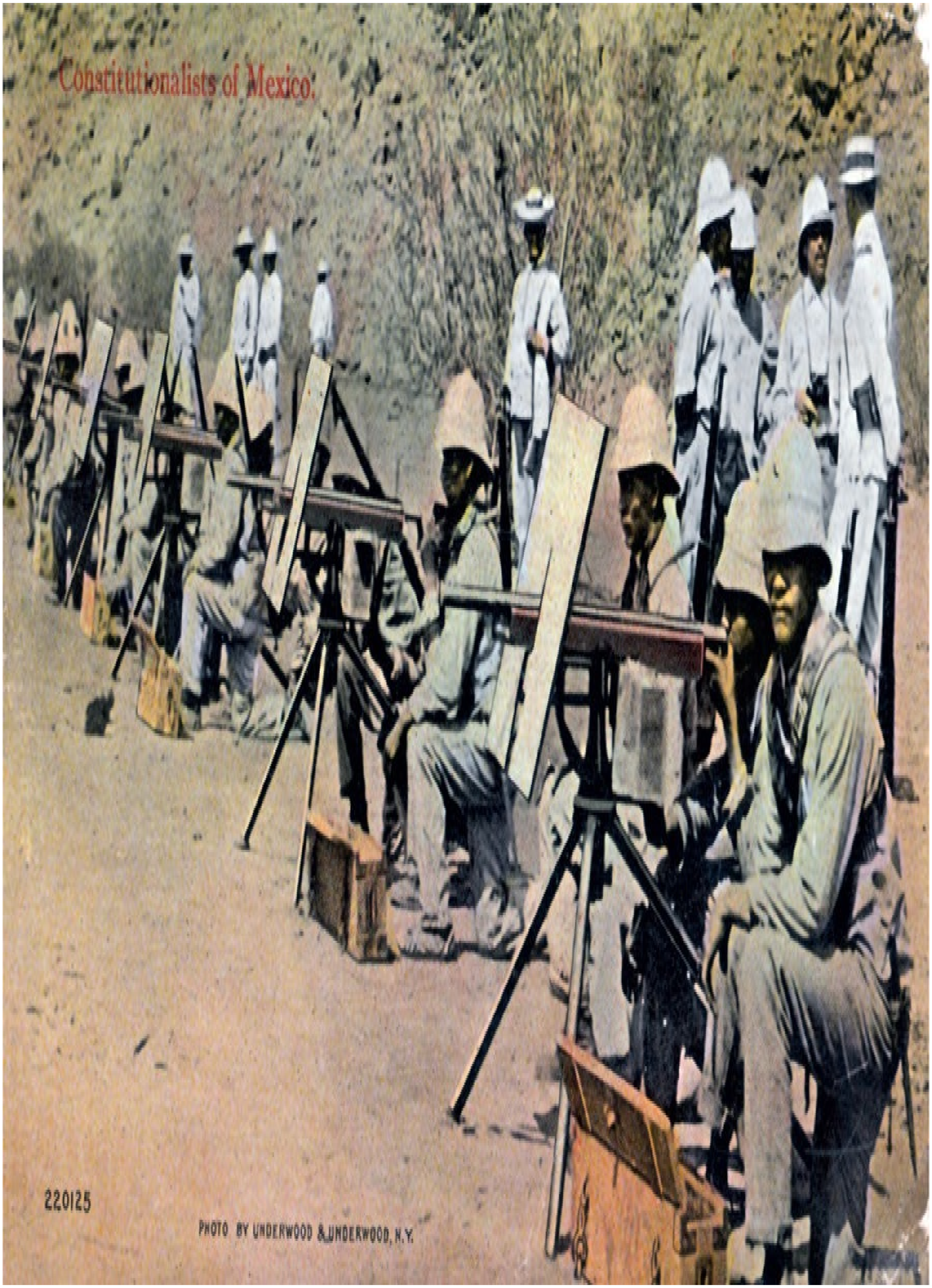
**This Mexican “Soldadera,” or female soldier of one of one of the many rebel armies, is well equipped to fight alongside her male comrades. The curiosity of the crowd and her nervousness may indicate that not all Mexicans were prepared to accept women in this role. Some commanders sympathized with the females who chose or were forced through circumstances to join the various armies. Sometimes, having lost a husband or partner, taking up a rifle was the only way for women to survive during the revolution. (Cody Images)**



**Villista cavalry led by two standard bearers prepare to move off after disembarking from one of the Division of the North trains. The flags carried by the men are the standard tricolor flag of Mexico and a revolutionary banner complete with skull and crossbones design. Several of the revolutionary armies had “death’s head” symbols on their flags, and the Zapatarists’ “Death Legion” added the symbol of Mexico, the Dark Virgin of Guadalupe, to theirs. (Cody Images)**

## The Battle of Leon – “Villa’s Waterloo”

The next great battle between Villa and Obregon was to be one of the bloodiest and longest in the history of the Mexican Revolution, lasting from April 17 to June 6, 1915. By late April, the Villista forces were ensconced in their new base at the town of Leon in Guanajuata State. Pancho Villa had somehow managed to gather a reported 35,000 men to defend Leon, but many of these were conscripts not up to the standard of his early troops. Other estimates put Villa’s strength at 19,500 cavalry and 6,000 infantry, but whatever the exact total, it was a huge army for the Mexican Revolution. To raise an army this size, Villa had been forced to call in some troops who had been campaigning in other parts of Mexico for the final titanic battle with Obregon. It was a testament to Villa that the majority of his men still believed in him even after the string of defeats they had suffered during 1915. General Obregon had moved his 25,000-strong army north-westwards from the site of his victories in early April towards Leon. The 6,000 men of his vanguard were, however, ambushed and defeated by a strong Villista cavalry force that utterly routed them. On hearing the news Obregon halted his army’s advance and dug in around the railway station at Trinidad. He had his men dig the system of trenches, on this occasion, in a large square around the station. The positions were strengthened with barbed wire and machine guns, and then he waited for the expected Villista attack. Having learned at least something from his recent defeats, Villa did not take the bait this time but instead had his troops dig 12 miles of entrenchments between Trinidad and Leon. Both sides now faced each other across a Western Front-style no-man’s land and spent the next month making suicidal attacks against each other’s emplaced machine guns. It now became a matter of who would lose patience first, and it was the ever-impatient Villa who did. Launching a huge offensive employing most of his army and including four large-scale cavalry attacks, he very nearly succeeded through sheer weight of numbers in overwhelming Obregon, whose left wing was driven back by the attacks. The Constitutionalist forces just about managed to hold, but as May drew to a close, they were utterly exhausted.



Constitutionalists of Mexico.

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PHOTO BY UNDERWOOD & UNDERWOOD, N.Y.

**A line of Constitutionalist machine gunners wearing the US pattern cork sun helmet prepared to fire their M1895 “potato digger” machine guns in 1915. Although slightly obsolete by this date, the M1895 was widely used by all sides during the Mexican Revolution. It got its name because of the swinging arm of the gun, which was vertically below the barrel when it fired. This meant that the gun had to be fired from a raised tripod and could not be used by the machine gunner lying prone on the ground. (Author’s Collection)**

They were also running low on ammunition, supplied by trains from Veracruz that had to run the gauntlet of Zapata-held territory. Zapatista attacks on Obregon’s supply trains were, however, somewhat halfhearted as their leader’s support for Villa waned. Villista cavalry spent late May and early June attacking the Constitutionalists’ rear areas, causing panic that spread to the front-line troops. Villa’s army had problems of its own, however, with many of its best officers and men killed during the fighting by Obregon’s well-trained sharpshooters. By early June, they were as exhausted as their opponents, as the battle turned into an expensive stalemate.

An event now occurred that could have altered the entire course of the war, when Obregon was struck by a shell while observing Villista forces from the belfry of a church. His arm was completely blown off and he attempted to kill himself with his revolver but failed. Badly wounded, Obregon was out of action at a crucial time for the Constitutionalist forces. General Benjamin Hill temporarily took command, ordering a counteroffensive against the Villistas on June 3. Although the attack was launched at precisely the right moment to take advantage of the Villistas’ fragile morale, Hill proved indecisive at the crucial moment. General Murgaia, the energetic commander of the Constitutionalist cavalry, saved the day and the offensive continued. Although the remaining Dorados fought bravely, armed largely with newly arrived Colt automatic pistols, they suffered heavy losses. At one point, during a particularly fierce five-minute firefight, a Villista soldier fell every second. Villa’s forces suffered a total of 10,000 dead and wounded during the battle and their left and right wings were pushed back in what turned into a rout. The Constitutionalists also suffered heavy casualties in this epic 38-day battle, with at least 2,000 dead in what some described as a Pyrrhic victory. One wry commentator said that the

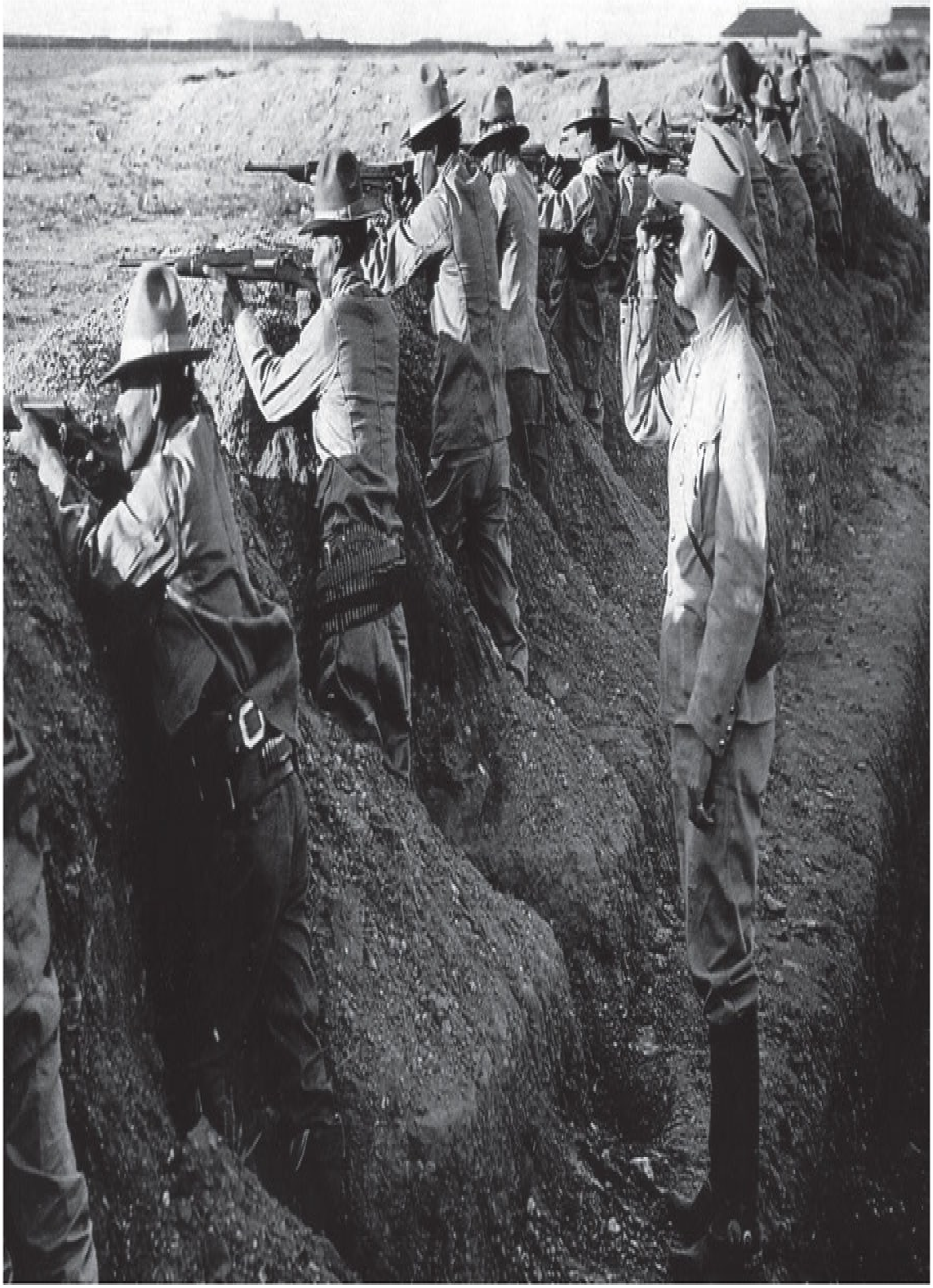
Constitutionalist Army “could not afford another victory like Leon.” The victory brought the usual war booty, with 3,000 rifles, 20 machine guns, six field guns, and 300,000 rounds of ammunition captured.

## The Battle of Aguascalientes

In the months after his defeat at Leon, Pancho Villa withdrew the remnants of his Division of the North to Aguascalientes to the northwest. At the same time, he sent substantial cavalry forces deep into Constitutionalist-held territory to attack Obregon’s supply lines, and in May and June launched yet another recruitment drive to raise a new army. Villa succeeded in purchasing around 7,000,000 rounds of ammunition from across the US border in preparation for the next clash with Obregon. His agents also purchased enough rifles from the USA to replace those lost at Celaya and Leon. Obregon’s Army of Operations was advancing steadily towards Aguascalientes and clashed with Villista forces on July 8, 1915. As soon as the fighting turned against him, Obregon ordered his troops to dig in and await the inevitable Villista attack. Once again, Villa refused to sit behind his defenses, ordering wasteful cavalry attacks against Obregon’s trenches. The attacks were not pressed home with the previous enthusiasm, however, as many of Villa’s men began to realize their commander was a poor general. These halfhearted attacks by the Villistas were easily countered by the increasingly confident Constitutionalists, who launched their own offensive on the 10th. This time the Division of the North broke in panic when it was outflanked by enemy cavalry commanded by General Murgaia. The panic spread throughout the Villista army, especially amongst the many raw recruits press-ganged into serving Pancho Villa. Some veterans of the Division of the North had also had enough and looked for a way out of the town before it fell. Many of Villa’s soldiers climbed on trains leaving Aguascalientes but most were stopped by Obregon’s cavalry. The entirety of Villa’s artillery and 4,000,000 rounds of ammunition were also captured when the train was ambushed by enemy cavalry. At this point it became “every man for himself,” and some soldiers left their weapons behind them when they fled. Constitutionalist cavalry, scouting ahead, even found large pots of stew still boiling in the Villista camp.

# The Battle of Agua Prieta

As the remaining men of the Division of the North withdrew yet further northwards during the late summer of 1915, they invaded the state of Sonora. The only Constitutionalist garrison in the state was at the town of Agua Prieta, under the command of General Plutarco Elias Calles. Villa and his army approached in the last days of October and prepared to attack the town, which they did on November 1. Calles had learned lessons from Obregon and had heavily fortified the town with trenches, electrified barbed wire, machine guns and artillery. Villa's troops had endured long desert marches to reach Sonora, but had still managed to drag a few batteries of field guns and some machine guns with them. Agua Prieta was right on the US border and reports of an impending battle attracted 4,000 Americans to watch the spectacle from a safe distance. Villa, almost unbelievably, repeated yet again the mistakes of the many battles he had fought and lost during 1915, launching frontal attacks against dug-in Constitutionalist troops. He attempted night attacks but his troops were caught in the beams of the defenders' searchlights. Villa was careful not to antagonize the US authorities and made sure that his artillery did not fire any shells close to the border. After two days of fighting, the Villistas were exhausted and the remaining 3,000 men retreated to the next border town, Naco, which was held by his men. The battle was another textbook victory for the Constitutionalists and virtually ended the ambitions of Villa and his vaunted Division of the North.



**Constitutionalist troops look out across the desert from their defensive positions outside the town of Agua Prieta on November 2, 1915. They are waiting for yet another attack by the Villista cavalry, who attempted a series of suicidal charges against dug-in troops with machine guns. It was the arrogance and confidence of Pancho Villa and his men that was used against them by the opposing commander, General Calles. Villa thought that one more charge would break the resistance of the defenders, but this only led to the sacrifice of the elite of his army. (Cody Images)**

# Villa’s Failing Fortunes, 1916–20

# Carranza in Power, 1917–20

In May 1917, the government of Venustiano Carranza was, at long last, democratically elected and he became, in effect, the dictator of Mexico in all but name. The hoped-for stability of Carranza’s presidency did not materialize, however, as his government was corrupt, and the promised reforms were not enacted. The lack of stability was not helped by the series of rebellions that broke out across Mexico, including in some areas previously unaffected by the revolution. In the north, Pancho Villa was no longer a threat to Carranza’s government, but he and the remnants of the Division of the North were still capable of creating trouble. The Constitutionalist Army was now undoubtedly strong enough to cope with Villa and other rebels who tried to challenge Carranza. These rebels included local irritants like Jose Ines Chavez Garcia, a violent bandit operating in Michoacan State. He was renowned for his cruelty and for cutting the throats of his prisoners, often with a gramophone record playing in the background. He led a small army, known as the “Chavistas,” which terrified its own and neighboring states for several years. The Chavistas were crushed by the Constitutionalist Army in 1918, having already been devastated by the Spanish influenza pandemic sweeping the world. Another rebel group, commanded by General Manuel Pelaez, operated in the oil-rich state of Veracruz, around the port of Tampico. Pelaez was a popular leader in his home Huasteca region, where he was regarded as a hero, along with his 5,000-man army. He extorted millions from oil companies until the Constitutionalist Army defeated him in 1919. The far western state of Baja California also saw an attempt at secession by a military adventurer called Esteban Cantu. He was a Federal colonel in the remote state in the far west of Mexico, who ran Baja California as his personal fiefdom from 1913 until 1915. Other groups emerged, in various parts of Mexico, describing themselves as “Felicistas” or supporters of Felix Diaz, the nephew of the old dictator. Diaz had made several attempts to overthrow the various governments of Mexico between 1913 and 1920. Throughout this period, his armies were never substantial enough to threaten whoever ruled in Mexico City. A revolt at Veracruz by Diaz himself was quickly defeated, as was another by the old Federal Army General Auerliano Blanquet on the Gulf Coast. His poorly organized rebellion was soon defeated and the old general’s head cut off and paraded through the streets on a pole. Although no rebel force emerged to seriously challenge Carranza during this period, the threat presented by Emiliano Zapata’s Army of the South remained.

**Venustiano Carranza, the Mexican politician turned supreme “Generalisimo” of the Constitutionalist forces from 1913 to 1920. Carranza had led the anti-Huerta forces from 1913 and claimed the presidency in 1914, making an enemy of Pancho Villa. He had no electoral mandate to lead the Mexicans but was brash enough to call himself “The Citizen First Chief of the Constitutionalist Army in Charge of the Executive Power of the Union.” He was fortunate as a non-military man to find the talented General Obregon to command his armies in 1915. (Cody Images)**

## Zapata’s Continuing Struggle, 1917–19

Zapata was a true revolutionary whose primary concerns were land reform and a better deal for the downtrodden Mexican peasant, and he had been disappointed by the lack of reforms from both Madero and Carranza. Zapata’s Army of the South had largely stayed out of the Constitutionalist–Conventionalist struggles of 1915 and 1916. Zapata and his men were content to stay in their home state, Morelos, and let the other factions fight it out over control of Northern Mexico. He knew that he did not have the access to arms and money that Pancho Villa had close to the US border. By 1916 Zapata’s forces had shrunk from their pinnacle of 25,000 in 1914 to about 5,000 committed fighters. Although Zapata could call on larger numbers when necessary, the Army of the South was crippled by the lack of new arms and ammunition. With the effective defeat of Villa in 1915, the Constitutionalists were now able to concentrate large numbers of troops against Zapata and other rebels. Every year between 1915 and 1918, Carranza’s army launched offensives into Zapata’s home state of Morelos and took most of its towns. Zapata was able to withdraw into the countryside and await the rainy season, during which his army would besiege the towns and usually retake them for a few months. By 1919, Carranza was tiring of these “seesaw” campaigns and decided to deal with Zapata once and for all. He arranged for one of his officers to offer to change sides and join Zapata, bringing his troops with him. On April 10, 1919, during one of the several meetings to discuss this arrangement, Zapata was ambushed with his entourage and shot down in a hail of bullets. Although some Zapatistas continued the guerrilla war against Carranza, the death of their charismatic leader effectively finished the Liberation Army of the South.

## The “End” of the Revolution, 1920

By 1920, even long-standing supporters of President Carranza had lost faith in him and the corruption surrounding him. His military commanders, including General Obregon, were looking for a way to get him out of office, and some had ambitions to replace him. The suspicious Carranza ordered that Obregon be kept under close watch while in Mexico City, and the general now felt his life was under threat. When, on April 2, the president issued an order for Obregon’s arrest, the general escaped from the capital dressed as a railway worker. He now gave his support to a rebellion by Constitutionalist General Plutarco Calles that was already underway in northern Mexico. Without the support of his generals and their troops, on May 7 Carranza decided to withdraw from Mexico City. Travelling in a total of 30 trains, crammed with supporters and government officials, as well as their belongings, furniture, servants, and other staff, Carranza set out for his old power base in Veracruz. The progress of this convoy of trains was soon slowed by armed attacks and strikes by railway workers along the route. Carranza finally agreed to leave his official train and set off with a few remaining Loyalists and a small bodyguard to continue the journey on horseback. On May 21, during an overnight stay in a simple worker’s hut, he was shot by his own troops and his body wastaken back to the capital for a state funeral. By November, the popular General Obregon had been elected as president and Mexico was to enjoy a period of relative peace. After ten years of civil conflict there were many unsettled grievances that would lead to a series of rebellions during the 1920s.

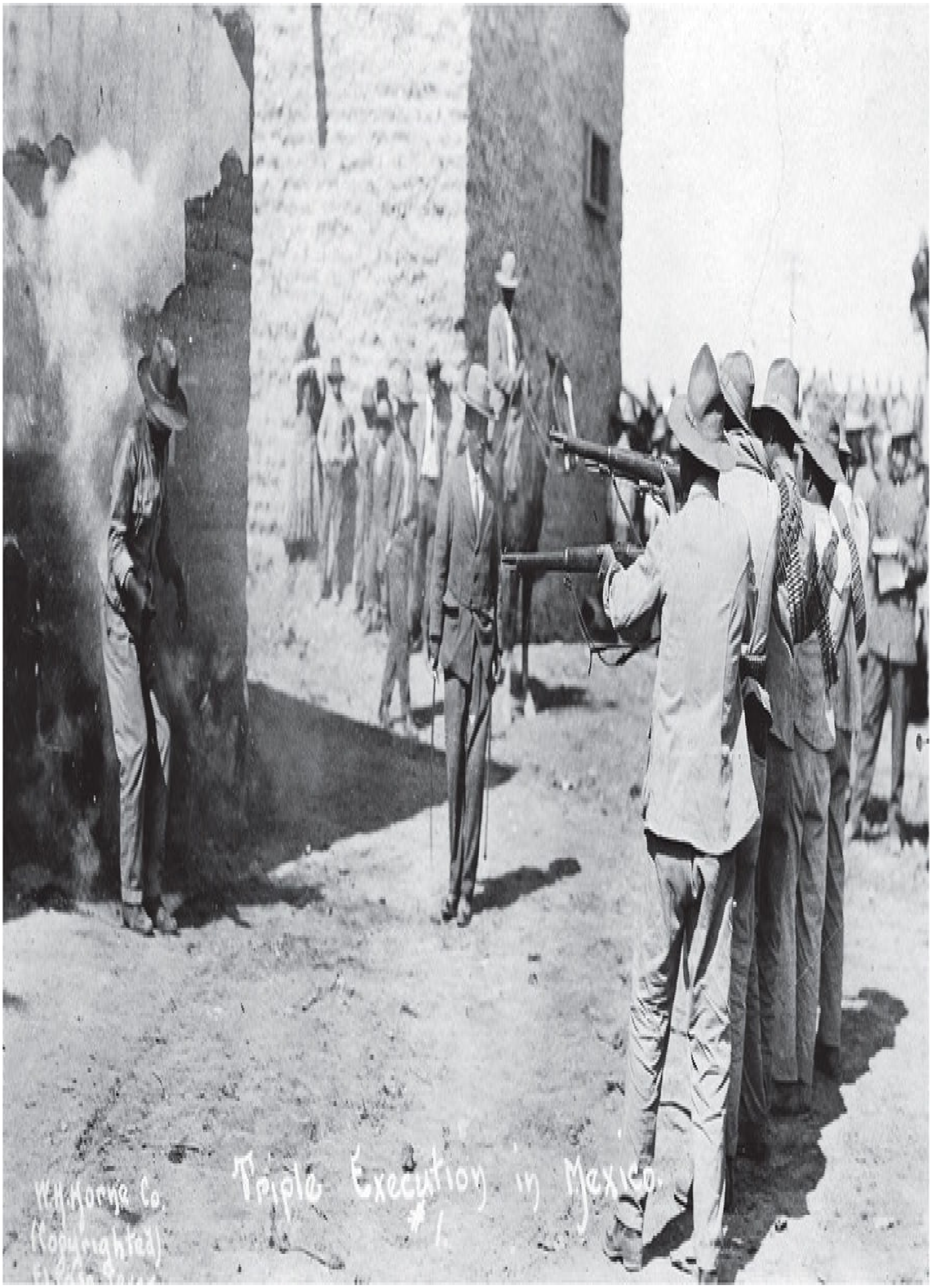
**Eufemio Zapata, the brother of Emiliano, poses in front of the gates of a hacienda with a captured Federal Army sword. Eufemio was a loyal supporter of his brother throughout the revolution and served as the Zapatistas’ chief of staff. His bouts of drinking led to depression and irrational behavior, including the severe beating of the father of one of his officers. In June 1917, the officer, with his family honor at stake, took his revenge by shooting Eufemio. (Cody Images)**

## Post-Revolution Rebellions 1923–29

The end of the Mexican Revolution in 1920 was never likely to be a clearcut end to such a major conflict, and the effects were to be felt for decades afterwards. Although Mexico was relatively peaceful after 1920, parts of the country were to be afflicted with conflict throughout the rest of the decade. By 1923, three of the major figures of the revolution were dead: Zapata in 1919, Carranza in 1920, and finally Pancho Villa in 1923. All three were shot under different circumstances but the reality was that, with the exception of General Obregon, the main political and military players of the revolutionary period had left the stage. In the same year as Villa’s assassination, Obregon, as Mexican president, faced the first of a series of rebellions led by his opponents in the military.

Rebel forces under Zapata.

**Zapatista cavalry are identified by the label stuck to the front of this photograph, taken in about 1914 when Zapata and his troops occupied Mexico City. They were collectively usually known as the “Liberation Army of the South” and were allied with Villa’s Division of the North. Zapatistas were usually organized into smaller bands under the command of their own “Jefe” or general. They only united into a large force a few times during the Mexican Revolution, but each contingent still owed allegiance to their own commander. (Cody Images)**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Triple Execution in Mexico.
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**This prisoner, seen at the moment of death, is one of three victims in a routine execution by a Constitutionalist Army firing squad. Officers of defeated armies were usually shot, as they were seen as being untrustworthy if they switched sides. Captured soldiers, however, were often given the choice of joining their captors, and some changed sides several times during the revolution. Particular groups, like the so-called “Colorados” of Orozco’s army, were always executed by their enemies. They were seen to have committed too many atrocities during their victorious campaigns to be spared. (Cody Images)**

## The 1923–24 Rebellion – “A Presidential Campaign under Arms”

After the death of President Carranza, the army of his successor, General Obregon, was still full of officers loyal to the former president’s memory. Although most Carranza Loyalists had been forced to leave the army, others were still in command positions. The huge size of the Federal Army, at 100,000 men, was financially unsustainable and Obregon decided to reduce it. While many ordinary soldiers were happy to be pensioned off, their officers were less happy to leave the army. Most could not hope to replace their army pay with a civilian job that would pay an equivalent salary. By 1923 there were only 71,000 men left in the army and the proportion of officers to other ranks was, at 20 percent, too high. When reducing the number of officers, Obregon unsurprisingly chose to get rid of pro-Carranza officers. This policy created a significant number of disgruntled ex-officers willing to support plots against Obregon’s rule. Army officers also resented the introduction, in February 1923, of Obregon’s policy of enlarging the military zones that Mexico was divided into. The new zones were then put under the command of officers loyal to Obregon, cutting other officers out of the command structure. A significant number of officers, and the troops loyal to them, were now dissatisfied with Obregon. It would only take the emergence of a leader willing to confront Obregon to spark a rebellion. This leader emerged in September 1923, when Obregon fell out with one of his senior politicians. Adolfo de la Huerta, from Sonora State, like Obregon, had been a loyal supporter of the president. The problem began when Benjamin Hill, one of Obregon’s best friends and the secretary of war, died suddenly. Although Hill’s death elevated de la Huerta to third place in the national leadership pecking order, this was not enough for him. He had fully expected to be named as the chosen candidate to succeed Obregon as president of Mexico. De la Huerta now exploited the various disputes within the army and government to plan a rebellion against Obregon. De la Huerta did not declare the rebellion himself, but one of his supporters in Guerrero State triggered it by attacking the Federal Army on November 30, 1923.

**Mexican rebels fire from their trench during the de la Huerta revolt of 1923–24 against the presidency of General Alvaro Obregon. De la Huerta’s support came mostly from some units of the Mexican Federal Army, although these men are obviously civilian volunteers. The rebels began to run out of ammunition by the end of the rebellion, and these men would be lucky to have more than a few rounds per man. (Cody Images)**

### *The Spread of the Rebellion*

By December 6, the states of San Luis Potosi, Chihuahua, Jalisco, Tamaulipes, Mochoacan, Sinaloa, Sonora, and Veracruz had declared for de la Huerta. In Veracruz a total of 12,000 troops, along with most of the Mexican Navy, also declared for the rebel cause. De la Huerta decided to base his rebellion at the port of Veracruz, and his troops captured the nearby city of Jalape on December 9. In Veracruz, the rebel commander was General Guadalupe Sanchez, one of the more competent rebel leaders. It was soon clear that, in addition to Veracruz, there were three other strongholds of the rebellion. These were in Jalisco, where rebel forces were commanded by General Enrique Estrada, and Oaxaca State, commanded by General Fortunato Mayacotte. Although a rebel general, the latter was not so much a supporter of de la Huerta as an opponent of Obregon. In the far south-east of Mexico, the three states of Campeche, Tabasco, and Yucatan also supported de la Huerta, but this remote region was far from the center of the rebellion. The rebels claimed to have 40,000 troops in total under their command, and half of the army’s officers at least nominally supported the rebellion. The reality was that the rebellion only had some 23,000 troops actively willing to support de la Huerta. In addition, from the start of the rebellion, the rebels were chronically short of ammunition for their rifles and artillery. There were reports that de la Huerta acquired limited supplies of arms and ammunition from Spain, England, France, and Germany. He did manage to buy a shipment of ammunition from a San Francisco-based firm but, in total, only received 300,000 bullets during the rebellion.

### *The Loyalists*

The remaining half of the Federal Army's officer corps, including most of the younger and progressive officers, supported Obregon. He also had the at least nominal support of 100 generals, but how many he could trust in reality was a concern. Crucially, the Mexican Air Force, equipped with a number of new US aircraft, remained loyal. De la Huerta, and many of his supporters, were openly anti-American, and the USA was willing to support Obregon as a result. The arrival of US-supplied DH-48 bombers, in addition to the planes the air force already had, was to give Obregon a vital edge in most battles with the rebel armies. As soon as the rebellion began, Obregon began recruiting new volunteers and old soldiers for the Federal Army, as well as importing armaments, including thousands of rifles and millions of rounds of ammunition, from the United States. One of Obregon's key aims was to leave enough troops in the north of Mexico to maintain the rail link with the USA.

### *The Fighting*

In late December, the loyal government army on the Veracruz front was forced to fall back. On the 27th, the rebels, under Mexico's best general, Rafael Buelna, won a victory in a cavalry engagement against over 2,000 Federales close to the city of Pueblo. The Federal Army was forced to evacuate the city of Pueblo on the 28th, and in the aftermath of its fall, General Estrada began an advance on Mexico City. The momentum of the rebel advances had to be maintained if they hoped to defeat Obregon, but Estrada's advance slowed as he tried to persuade units loyal to Obregon to join his ranks without bringing them to battle. His main target was a large government arsenal en route to the capital and, again, he hoped to win over with the Loyalists facing him, but the slower pace of the rebel advance was to prove fatal to their cause. Obregon moved more troops to block their path to Mexico City, and by late January 1924, although the rebels could still point to successes on some fronts, in reality their failure against Mexico City ended their hopes. Although the city of Tampico held out, the rebels held the rest of the province with a 2 to 1 superiority, but its oil supplies remained in Obregon's hands. The hero of the rebel victory in late December, General Buelna, was killed in battle on January 24. In the same month the rebels in the west, having gained ground, faced a reverse, accepting into their ranks 2,000 apparently "turncoat" government troops captured at Tabasco who merely bided their time to turn on de la Huerta's forces at the first opportunity. By early February, the Federal Army was in the ascendancy, reversing the situation of the previous month. On the 5th, the rebel army evacuated Veracruz, with most of its troops taking shelter on the nearby Tehuantepec Isthmus. Strangely, the rebels briefly reoccupied the port on the 9th, before again abandoning it. While his troops evacuated Veracruz, the rebel leader took ship and traveled south, with his entourage, to establish a new base. They arrived at Merida, on the north coast of Yucatan State in Mexico's far south, from where de la Huerta hoped to fight on. Far too late to attract supporters to his doomed cause, he finally issued a political manifesto. Recognizing the war was lost, de la Huerta planned to escape from his remote southern bastion to the shelter of the USA. On February 10, the last of the rebels in central Mexico stood and fought on the banks of the Lorma River for 11 hours, their surrender ending the rebellion. By the 19th, Obregon's troops had retaken the rebel-held states of Guerrero and Oaxaca in the south-eastern region of Mexico. The government army was also advancing on the oil-producing city of Taxpanu, which they recaptured on the 25th. By late February, many of de la Huerta's generals were looking for a way out, to avoid the firing squads they knew would be waiting for them. De la Huerta had already fled into exile, managing to reach Los Angeles in the USA on March 7. As his rival Obregon had humorously predicted at the outset of the rebellion, the musical de la Huerta was forced to earn a living in Los Angeles giving singing lessons. In some states in the far south of Mexico, rebels continued to hold out against Obregon with the support of the rebellious Mexican Navy, but by the end of April, even they had abandoned the fight. The rebellion had cost a total of 7,000 dead and had effectively broken the old Federal Army's hold on Mexican society.

### *Obregon's Revenge*

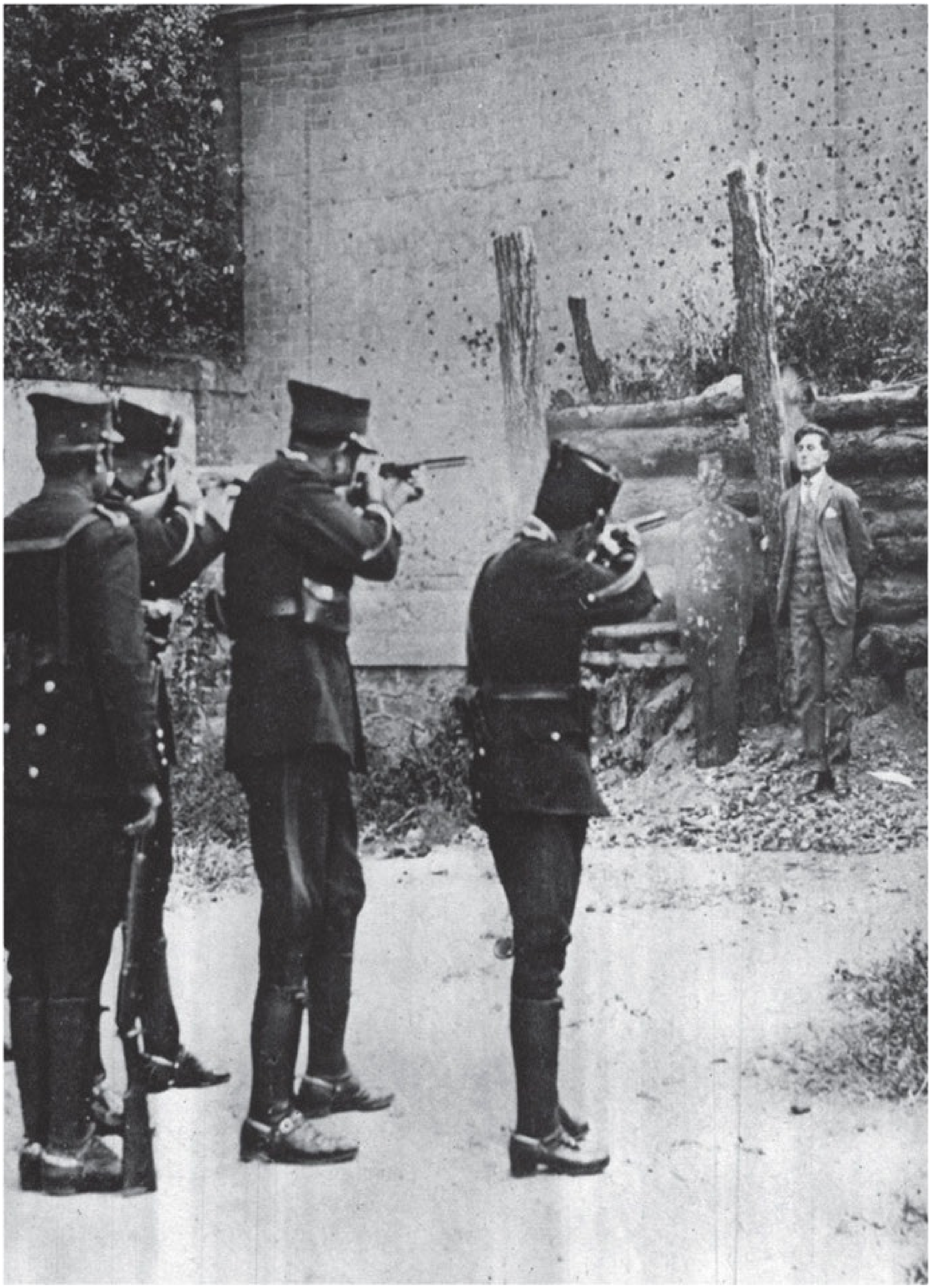
In the aftermath of the government victory, Obregon was in no mood for reconciliation. Fifty-four rebellious generals were tried and shot by firing squad along with every officer over the rank of major, with only those who had changed sides during the revolt being spared.

He also purged the more disloyal from the rank and file, reducing the army's size by 7,000 men. It was a chance to streamline the Federal Army and to try and put an end to those rivalries left over from the revolution. In addition to the human cost, the Mexican Government spent $30 million to suppress the rebellion, funds it could ill afford.

# The 1927 Revolt

The 1927 revolt was a fairly small-scale affair led by two disgruntled generals, Arnulfo. R. Gomez and Francisco. R. Serrano, who were angry that Alvaro Obregon had decided to run for office again to succeed President Calles. Both felt they would make a better president than Obregon and wanted to stand against him. Having won the commander of troops in Mexico City, General Eugenio Martinez, to their cause, they prepared to launch their revolt in August. Martinez, a drunkard, boasted in the bars of the capital about the imminent overthrow of the government. He was forced to resign and was sent to Europe on a fact-finding mission but his successor, General Hector Almada, also backed Gomez and Serrano, meeting with them in August. The plot was discovered by Calles' agents, and in September, the two generals fled Mexico City with prices on their heads, gathering any sympathetic troops into a makeshift army. Hoping the renegade generals had gathered substantial forces, Almada left the capital with 1,000 men to try and join them. On Ocrtober 3, General Serrano was captured by Loyalist troops and was summarily executed. Gomez and Almado now knew that they would receive no mercy if they surrendered. Gathering what men they had at Veracruz, they sent recruiting parties into the countryside. Few men volunteered for their forlorn cause and, in desperation, they press-ganged local Indians into their rebel ranks.

Determined to crush this latest revolt, the government sent an army of 8,000 men, diverting units from fighting the Cristeros, supported by nine planes of the ever-loyal air force, to locate the rebels who had taken to the countryside. Reports of 26,000 men supporting the revolt proved exaggerated and, across Mexico, any units that showed signs of rebellion were ruthlessly crushed. As a stark warning to others, the rebellious 16th Battalion was massacred by government troops. On October 9, the main rebel army of 1,200 men was located and roundly beaten in a 15-minute battle. Many of its troops were the poorly trained Indians shanghaied into rebel ranks, and 500 immediately surrendered. A few hundred rebels escaped the battlefield and continued to cause problems for another month or so until, on November 4, General Gomez was captured and shot. General Almada was luckier, crossing the border into the USA and leaving the ill-conceived rebellion's shattered remnants behind.



**The Cristero Rebellion was supported by many Catholics, who at least sympathized with their cause defending their religious rights against the anti-Catholic Calles government. A plot to kill national hero General Obregon was uncovered, and this Cristero supporter is about to be executed for his part in it. The government ruthlessly subdued Cristero resistance in the countryside and the revolt petered out by 1928. (Cody Images)**

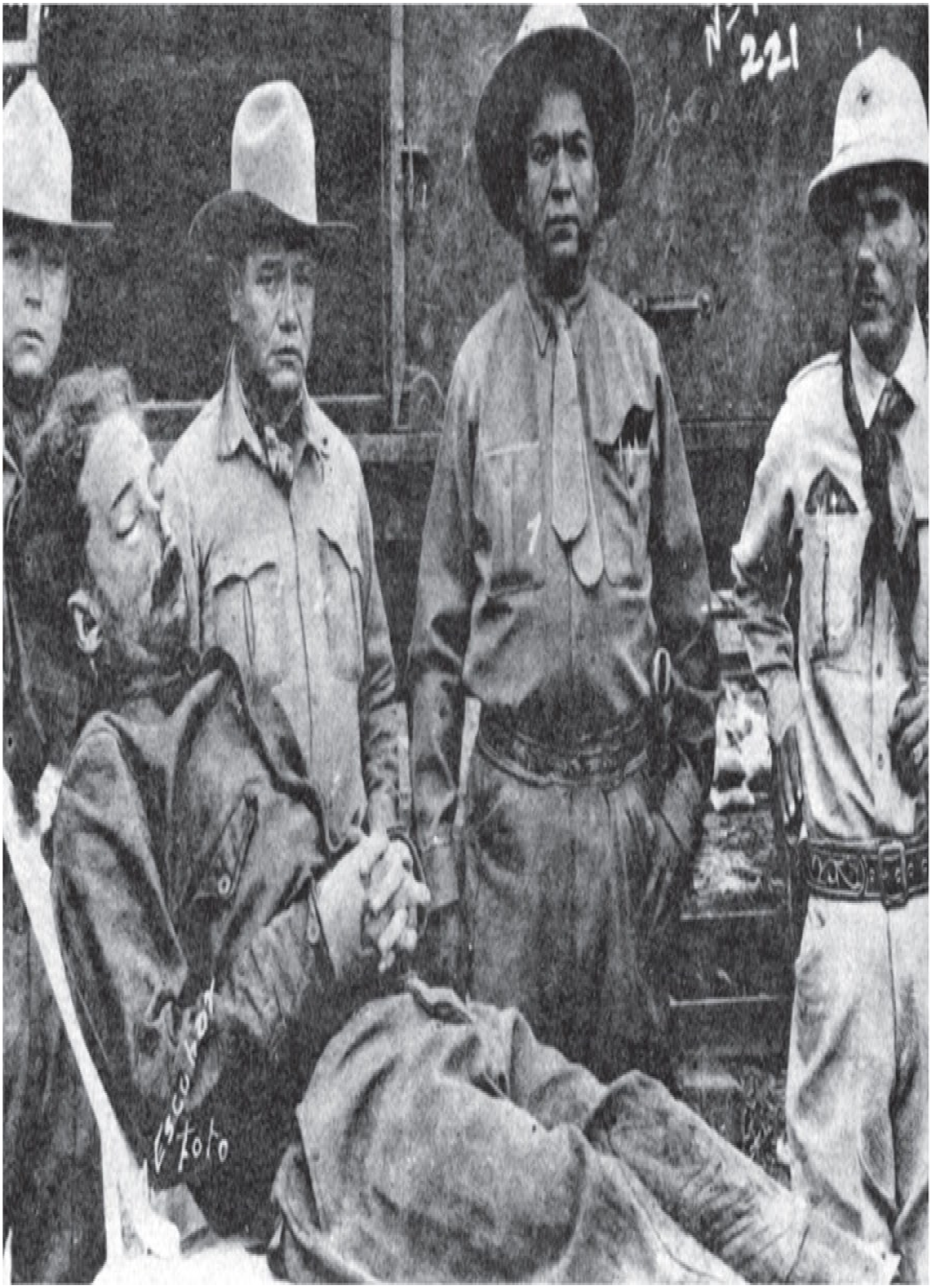
## The “Cristero Rebellion” 1927–29

Throughout the mid- to late-1920s, Mexico was in the throes of a power struggle between the Mexican Government and the Catholic Church. The government of President Calles had little time for the Church’s establishment, whom they considered reactionary. Many former revolutionaries believed the Church had been too sympathetic to the governments of both Diaz and Huerta during the Mexican Revolution. From 1917, the Carranza government’s constitution had introduced a number of draconian anti-Church policies. These policies aimed to reduce the influence of the Church within Mexican society, but had been largely ignored until the Calles government came to power in 1923. Calles enforced the various policies, which proved very unpopular with the traditionalist population of rural Mexico. Many Catholics, including ex-military officers, were ready to fight for the Church’s rights and were outraged further by the expulsion of the Pope’s representative from Mexico that year. In addition, priests were only legally permitted to preach in government-designated churches. In the countryside, discontent escalated to protests and then again to armed opposition, by the so-called Cristeros, to the policies. On January 1, 1927, the so-called “Cristero Rebellion” began, with the issuing of a manifesto entitled “To the Nation.” The manifesto included phrases like “the hour of victory belongs to God” and “the hour of battle has sounded.” Almost immediately, bands of armed rebels began attacking villages in the Los Altos region to the north-east of the city of Guadalajara. The priority for these poorly armed bands was to seize rifles to replace the old muskets and farming implements they were armed with. Throughout the entire rebellion, the insurgents were forced to rely on captured arms and ammunition, usually from Federal garrisons or police stations. At first, the Cristeros were mostly confronted by local pro-government militia, known as “Agraristas,” as badly trained as they were, and the Social Defence Forces, a militia that supported the Calles government. As regular Federal units moved into Jalisco, they regarded the campaign as nothing more than a police action, or as one officer said, as a glorified “hunt.”

The Cristero leadership was a mix of ex-professional officers, local gentry, and priests, several of the latter fighting in the field as priest-commanders. Two of these religious “warriors,” Father Pendroza and Father Vega, were far from conventional clergymen. Both were described as born soldiers, took to military life with enthusiasm, and were joined by other fighting priests. The priests either fought with the Cristeros or risked their lives by supplying them with food, arms, and ammunition. Other prominent leaders included a ranch hand, Victoriano Ramirez – known as “El Catorce,” or “the fourteen” – who had earned his nickname by killing 14 guards during a jail break. The senior Cristero military commander was a mercenary, General Enrique Gorostieta, who demanded twice the salary of a Federal general from the rebels. Although his sympathy for the Cristero cause was lukewarm, Gorostieta was undoubtedly professional and managed to turn their forces into a disciplined army. His death in a skirmish in June 1929 was a heavy blow for the Cristeros, but fighting continued for several months afterwards. During the rebellion an estimated 50,000 men fought for the Cristeros, with the support of thousands of women. Some of the women formed themselves into “Saint Joan of Arc” brigades, which acted as second-line forces but fought alongside the men when necessary. In the cities, sympathizers tried to buy or steal arms for the Cristeros, many paying the price in front of a firing squad. One of the best sources of ammunition were Federal camp followers, however, who sold handfuls of bullets at seven centavos each. On occasion, more significant quantities of ammunition could be bought, with some larger forces buying up to ten crates of ammunition at a time from corrupt Federal officers. There were few heavy weapons in Cristero hands, apart from one or two crude, homemade cannon. Grenades were also made, using explosives taken out from bombs dropped by the Federal Air Force.

**Cristero fighters sort through some captured rifles and ammunition during their revolt against the Mexican Government in 1926. One of the main problems for the Cristeros was their constant shortage of ammunition, which crippled their military campaigns. One man sorts through the ammunition on the ground, looking for bullets to fit his captured Mexican Federal Army Mauser rifle. (Cody Images)**

**A significant government effort was required to defeat the Cristero Rebellion, with an estimated 100,000 Federal troops involved by 1929. The number of troops engaging the rebels in 1927 was 75,000, but a desertion rate of up to 35 percent per year necessitated constant recruiting to make good the losses. Some recruits were press-ganged, others convicts released from jail on condition they served with the army, and large number of Yaqui Indians were also recruited even while their own people were themselves in rebellion against the Federal Government. There were, in addition, two paramilitary forces fighting alongside the regular army: the "Agaristas," a rural militia, and the Social Defense Forces, or SDF, whose ranks included a large number of ex-Villista and Zapatista veterans. These two militia formations bore the brunt of much of the early fighting in 1927 but increasing numbers of regular troops were drawn in as the fighting progressed. The USA supplied the Federal Army with new weapons, including 10,000 Enfield rifles.**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**General Saturnino Cedillo in the center of the background of this photograph poses with the body of the last senior Cristero commander, General Enrique Gorostieta. He was killed in a firefight on June 3, 1929 and his death virtually ended the Cristero struggle, although a few fanatical Cristeros did continue the fight under the command of Colonel Ignacio Navarro. Cedillo was to prove to be the last of the rebellious Mexican generals when he fought the government nine years later. (Cody Images)**

### *The Campaign, 1927–29*

The crucible of the Cristero Rebellion was the central states of Mexico, with northern and southern states little affected. There were some 8,000 Cristeros in the field when the rebellion began, and these men won several notable victories against the "Agaristas" and the Social Defense Forces. The Cristeros began their campaign by attacking trains and isolated garrisons, frequently shooting any Federal troops they captured. In retaliation, the Federal troops shot anyone caught aiding the rebels and a large number of priests. The Cristeros' first leader was captured and shot by the Federal Army on May 23, 1927 and was replaced by ex-Federal officer, Enrique Gorostieta. Under Gorostieta's command, the Cristeros' numbers grew and proper training was given, with 20,000 men in the field against the Federal Army by December 1927. An additional 5,000 men and women had joined the rebel ranks by February 1928, numbers seemingly limited only by the lack of weaponry. Many Cristeros carried only machetes, using them to great effect, but given the opportunity, would swap these for any available firearm. The Federal Army was expanded during 1928, and more planes sent to the front, in an effort to contain the rebellion. With a shortage of Mexican pilots, these planes were often flown by US veterans of World War I. A major government offensive, involving 30 infantry regiments, six regiments of mountain artillery, and three squadrons of light bombers, was launched in December 1928. Although the two-month offensive failed to destroy the Cristeros, it did force great fragmentation of their units. During 1929, the government abandoned its previous policy of killing all Cristero captives. More and more Cristeros now abandoned the one-sided struggle. A hard core of fanatics remained, however, unwilling to give up the fight and expecting little mercy if defeated. On June 4, 1929, the last band of Cristeros was cornered and destroyed by the Federal Army in Jalisco State. Amongst the captured Cristeros was General Gorostieta, whose rank did not save him from the firing squad. Talks eventually led to an official ceasefire at the end of June 1929. Most of the grievances that had initially sparked the rebellion were settled. The Mexican Catholic Church was allowed to retain its buildings and other assets and its priests were permitted to continue to live in them. Only 300 Catholic priests remained in Mexico by the end of the fighting, however, the other 4,200 having emigrated or been killed between 1926 and 1929. With 56,882 Federal troops and 30,000 Cristero fighters dead, a total butcher's bill of 90,000 combatants had perished in the often bitter fighting, along with an unknown number of civilians, making this one of the more brutal conflicts in Mexican history.

## The 1929 "Escobar Rebellion"

General Alvaro Obregon, Mexico's popular and capable military leader, stood as a presidential candidate again for the 1928 Mexican elections. On July 17, he was gunned down in a restaurant by a fanatical Catholic supporter of the Cristeros. His sudden death threw the country into chaos, as his promises of wide-scale reforms if elected died with him. President Calles now sought another candidate that he could endorse. Obregon had been popular with many army officers, but they were unhappy with Calles' choice of Emilio Portes Gill as provisional president. Obregon had provided assurances to army officers about their careers. With his death, many now feared for their futures, and some of these disgruntled officers began plotting against Calles. The date of their coup d'état was agreed for spring 1929 but an unforeseen incident forced them to bring their plans forward. When one of the plotters, the army commander at the port of Veracruz, was ordered to redeploy two units of his garrison, the rebels panicked. Thinking their plot had been uncovered, on March 3, 1929, the conspirators abandoned the coup and immediately launched a military revolt. Senior officers across Mexico joined the revolt, bringing the units under their command over to the rebels. Although centered in the states of northern Mexico, there were outbreaks in a number of regions across the country. The rebellion's leader was General Gonzalo Escobar, one of the Mexican Federal Army's most popular officers.

**Mexican troops supporting the government of President Calles are waiting to be transported by rail to fight the rebel army of General Escobar in March 1929. The decisive battle of the rebellion took place at Jimenez in Chihuahua State, with about 8,000 men on each side. Escobar’s well-trained cavalry were unable to penetrate the electrified fencing protecting the well-dug-in Federal Army and had to retreat. (Cody Images)**

### *The Two Armies*

Escobar could count on the support of 17,000 troops in total, a large number of whom were indigenous Yaqui Indians. These Yaqui fighters brought a large number of camp followers with them, who often, in the old “Soldadero” tradition, fought alongside their men. Vivid memories of the fate of their rebellious comrades in 1923–24 and 1927 dissuaded many officers from joining the revolt. General Escobar was an effective commander and tried his best to mold his disparate units into a force capable of facing the large Federal Army. Unfortunately for Escobar, some of his senior comrades were not of a similar caliber, and failed him repeatedly. Knowing the Mexican Air Force would remain loyal, Escobar tried to organize his own air arm. A number of mercenary US pilots, reportedly offered $1,000 a week, were organized into an international squadron, known as the “Yankee Doodle Escadrille.” It is not known if they ever received their pay. Escobar also tried to bolster his army by improvising a number of “light tanks” on the chassis of agricultural tractors, but, when employed, they were swiftly destroyed by the Federal Army’s 37mm guns.

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**The pilot of a Mexican Federal Government US-supplied Waco Model 10 improvised light bomber rests after a night patrol against the Escobar rebels in April 1929. This type of plane was used for a role that it was not really designed for, with its co-pilot having to throw hand grenades at the enemy. According to reports, he also fired a Thompson sub-machine gun at ground targets, as the plane lacked a fixed machine gun. (Author's Collection)**

Although the government could count on some 50,000 loyal troops when the rebellion broke out, many were already engaged in suppressing the Cristero Rebellion. The campaign against the Cristeros had to be temporarily suspended, freeing significant numbers to fight Escobar's rebels. The Federal Army commander, General Juan Andreu Almazan, proved the equal of Escobar and his poor commanders. With more troops and artillery, and the support of a large and utterly loyal air force, the government held a very strong hand.

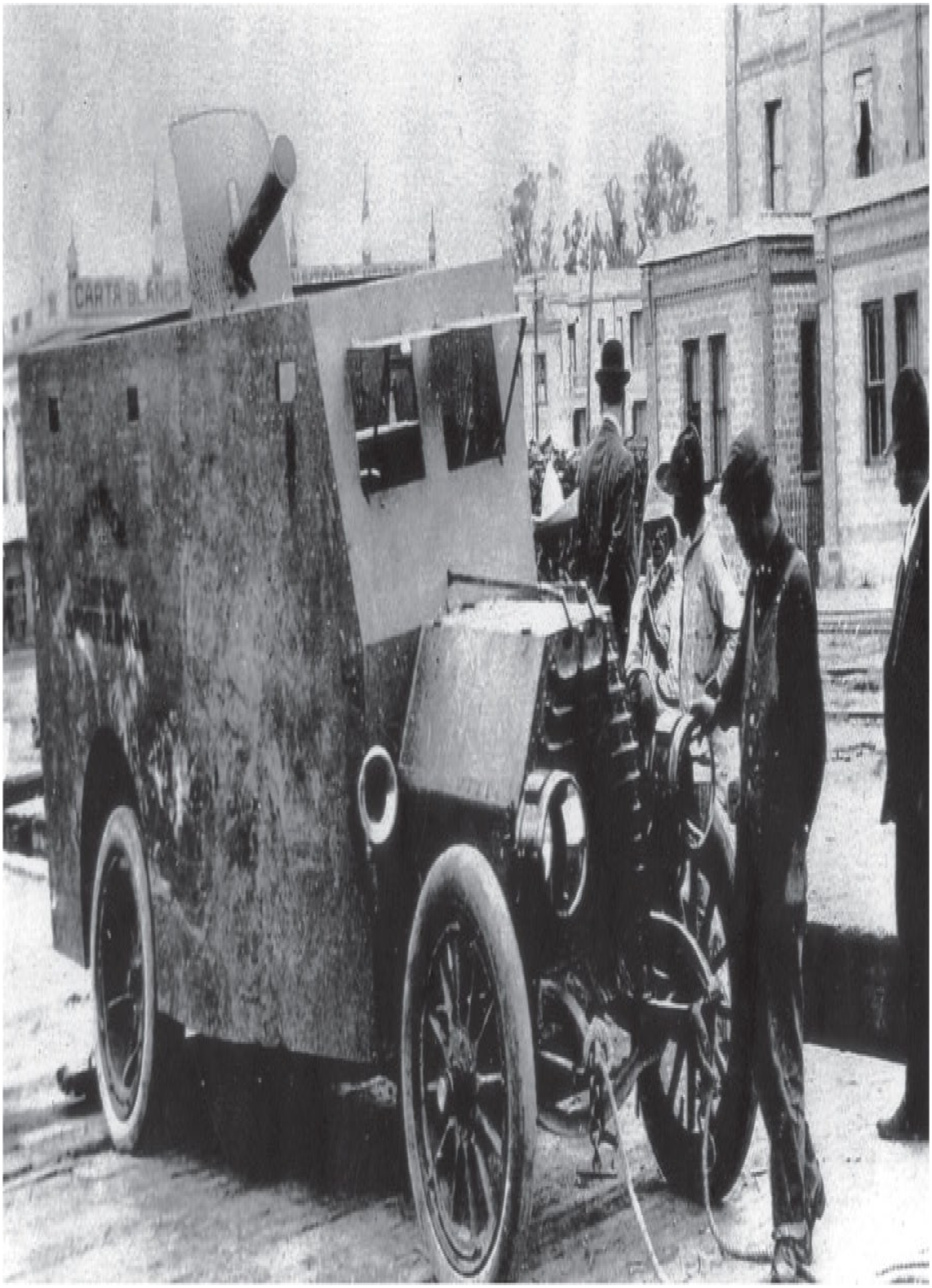
## *The Campaign*

With the outbreak of the revolt, Escobar's allies quickly seized four northern states – Sonora, Chihuahua, Durango, and Choahuila. Despite these early successes, Escobar knew full well that the Federal position would only grow stronger the longer the fighting dragged on. He ordered the commander of the rebel armies in Durango and Sonora to advance southwards into Zacatecas and Sinaloa. Escobar took advantage of this distraction to march most of his available units against the city of Monterey, capital of Nuevo Leon State. After ten hours of fighting, the rebels took Monterey on March 4; the Loyalist commander, General Lurraiga, was killed and three other generals were captured. In addition to 570 troops and 78 officers, Escobar's army also captured a large number of rifles and machine guns. Monterey proved to be the high-water mark of the rebellion, however, followed by the failure of the revolt in the Pacific port of Veracruz. Although buoyed by the support of the Mexican Navy, the rebels could not prevent Loyalist forces recapturing the port. President Calles had dispatched a large expeditionary force to Veracruz by train, which was now diverted to deal with Escobar's main force. Monterey was abandoned after only a few days as Escobar turned to meet the threat of the advancing Federal Army.

Escobar realized that, in reality, he had little genuine support from the mediocre band of fellow rebel generals, many of whom were busily looting the banks in the towns and cities under their control, in preparation for a comfortable exile. Although despairing of the situation, he managed to gather a sizeable army, only to suffer further disappointment when reports of the failed offensives into Sinaloa and Zacatecas reached him. Rebel forces under General Francisco Manzo had attacked Mazatlan, in Sinaloa, in late March. Despite the city's poor defenses, Manzo's commanders bickered to such a degree that they failed to capture it and, instead, sat back waiting for the forces under their commander-in-chief to achieve victory for them when they confronted the Federal Army.

### *The Battle of Jimenez – "Last Battle of the Mexican Revolution"*

From their northern stronghold, Escobar's army of about 8,000 moved south, taking up positions at the town of Jimenez. He ordered his men to entrench, but they lacked sufficient barbed wire and machine guns to construct effective defenses. Meanwhile, General Almazan's Federal Army crossed the desert, arriving in the vicinity of Jimenez on March 31. Although exhausted, Almazan's troops had to prepare their own entrenchments before the rebels could launch an attack. The 8,600 Federal troops soon constructed fortifications, well protected with electrified wire. The Federal assault on the rebel positions began on April 1, with the intention of outflanking their entrenchments. This first day's attack failed, and on the 2nd, Almazan canceled a second attack, instead prepared to face a rebel assault. This was launched at dawn, rebel cavalry attacking securely entrenched Federal defenders. Escobar's army was half cavalry and he hoped these would penetrate Federal lines. Like Villa in 1915, Escobar overestimated his cavalry's ability to overcome machine guns and barbed wire.


CARTA BLANCA

**This Fiat armored car belonging to the Mexican Federal Army has been disabled by the rebel forces of General Escobar during fighting in March 1929. The rebels in the 1929 rebellion were well organized, especially in the general’s power base in northern Mexico. As well as a few armored cars like this one, Escobar had a number of small tanks built on the chassis of agricultural tractors. He also tried to build up his air arm using US pilots, who flew his ten aircraft for a reported $1,000 per week. (Cody Images)**

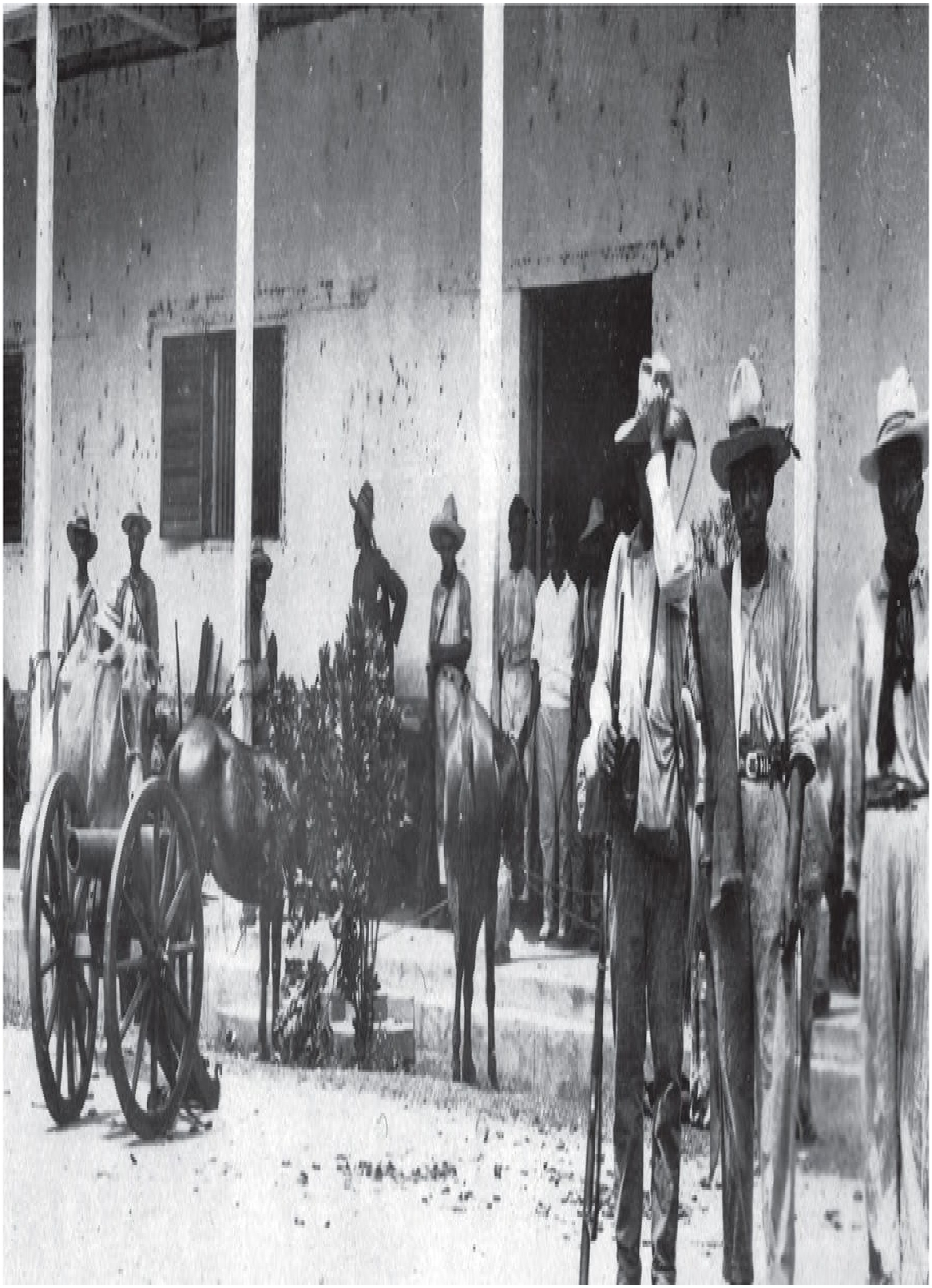
A determined attack by Escobar’s infantry got within 80 yards of the Federal lines but eventually broke. With his cavalry decimated and his infantry demoralized, Escobar ordered a retreat to a number of trains waiting to take his army to safety in the north. Federal field guns shelled the retreating rebels but, as night fell, the majority of Escobar’s troops were able to escape. Escobar’s army had lost 1,000 men killed and 500 wounded, with 2,000 more in captivity.

After the defeat at Jimenez, Escobar and his remaining 2,000 rebels withdrew northwards to their stronghold in Chihuahua State, eventually disbanding. The only substantial rebel army remaining was garrisoning Sonora, having withdrawn following its failed offensive in Sinaloa. On April 17, the main Federal Army, under General Lazaro Cardenas, entered Sonora and moved against the rebels. A number of air squadrons now deployed to Sonora and their planes began an incessant bombardment of rebel concentrations. Under this constant aerial bombardment, the morale of the already demoralized rebel army collapsed, rendering another major battle unnecessary. By the end of April, most rebels had deserted and the reluctant General Fausto Topete did not have the stomach for a fight. Along with most of his rebel colleagues, he fled into exile across the US border, avoiding the inevitable punishment for his revolt. On May 3, the two-month long rebellion officially ended and 6,000 rebel troops were marched into captivity. Most historians saw the 1929 rebellion as the final convulsion of the troubled aftermath of the Mexican Revolution. By many it was seen to mark the end of the revolution that had begun 19 years earlier and which had cost Mexico an estimated 2,000,000 dead.

# CONFLICTS OF THE 1920s

**Two legendary US Marines seconded to the Nicaraguan National Guard pose with two Thompson-armed guardsmen in their jungle base during the anti-Sandino campaign. The Marine with the pipe is First Lieutenant Lewis B. “Chesty” Puller, who served in Haiti in 1915, and Nicaragua in 1928–31 and then 1932–33. He fought in several battles during World War II, including the Guadalcanal campaign, and in Korea, where he commanded the 1st Marines, and retired in 1955. His comrade is Sergeant William “Iron Man” Lee, another of the “gung-ho” breed of US Marines who really were larger-than-life characters. (Library of Congress)**

The end of the Great War, and the Paris Peace Conference that followed, saw an attempt to bring stability to world politics with the formation of the League of Nations in January 1920. Latin American countries were of course invited to join the League, but there were some nations whose governments were deemed to be too unstable or unreliable to be members, including Mexico, Costa Rica, and the Dominican Republic. Some of the nations that did receive membership soon became disillusioned by the League’s lack of interest in their affairs. The League did not want to arbitrate between the Latin American countries over border disputes that they saw as trivial. It was now left to the countries of Latin America to continue to settle their own disputes by the usual military means. Any peace overtures would still have to come from the USA, whose interference in Latin American affairs continued to be resented. In 1920 there was little money available to wage war in Latin America. The region was in recession due to a reduction in trade with the rest of the world during the 1914–18 conflict. Even the richest Latin American countries, like Argentina, struggled to develop their economies. The 1920s would see war fought for smaller and smaller gains, often by impoverished nations or factions. These conflicts were usually fought by troops armed with the same old tired rifles and machine guns that their fathers had carried into battle in the 1900s.



**Honduran troops mill around their headquarters after the battle of Santa Rosa during the 1919–20 civil war. The soldiers guard the small cannon which made up the artillery of Honduras in the 1920s. Wearing mostly civilian clothing, the various armies that fought in Honduras during the conflict would have worn ribbons on their hats to denote which side they were on. (Author's Collection)**

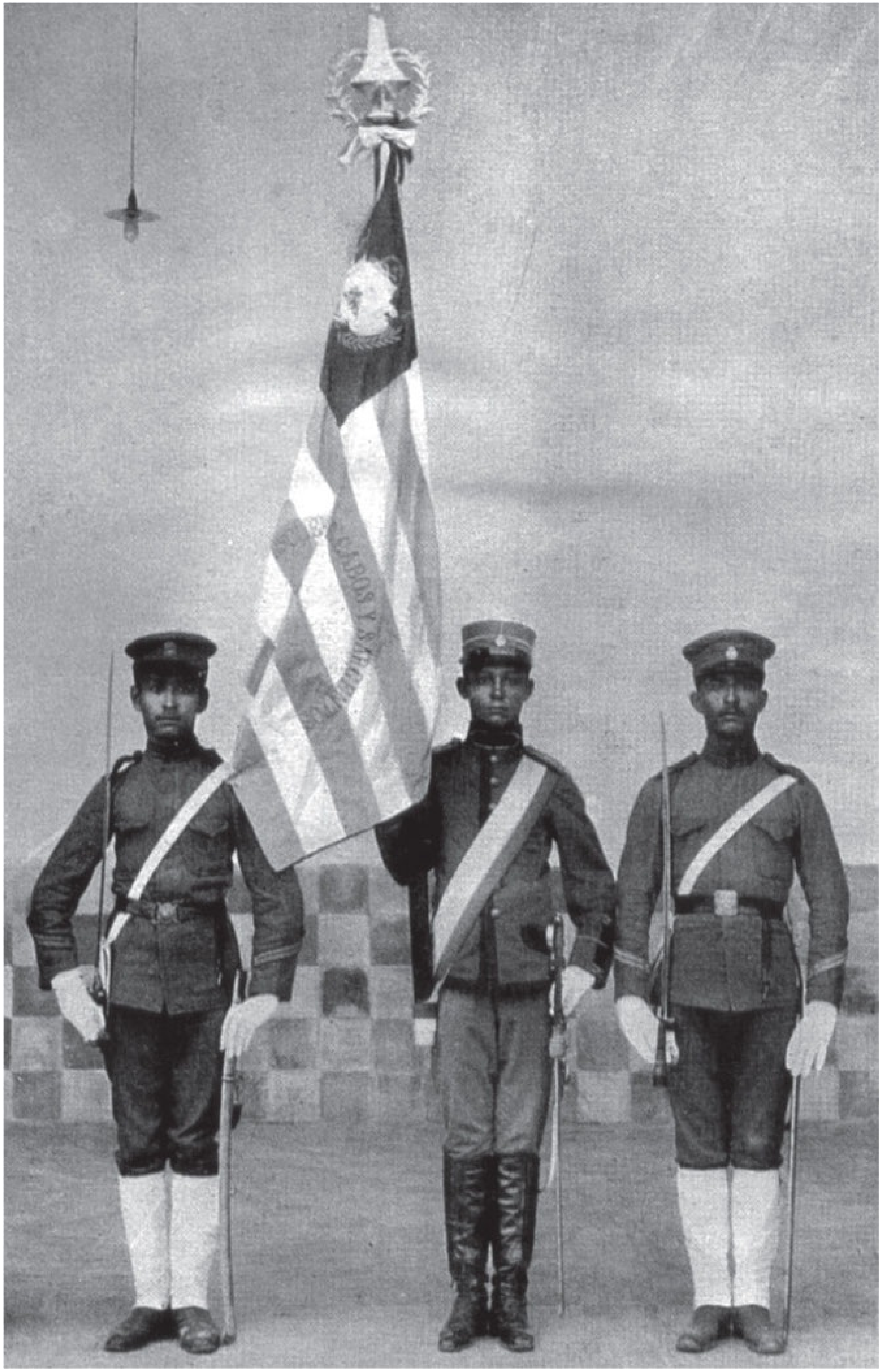
## The Honduran Civil War 1919–20

Honduras had suffered a series of civil conflicts during the 1900s and 1910s, but since 1913 it had been governed by President Francisco Bertrand. During his troubled presidency, he lived in fear of the influence of the powerful banana companies. They made demands on him for more land to grow their crops that he knew he could not meet without provoking the Honduran people. By 1919 his hold on power was weakening and he tried to cling onto the presidency by jailing opposition politicians and even having some of his rivals assassinated. He also tried to strengthen his army, even at the expense of crippling the fragile Honduran economy. In 1919, Bertrand was spending an astounding 57 percent of the government's budget on the military. By July of that year, around 1,300 Hondurans planned to leave the country to organize a rebellion from Nicaragua. Inside Honduras, some of Bertrand's army officers were planning a revolt and had put out feelers to both Guatemala and Nicaragua seeking support. Bertrand, in turn, approached El Salvador for military support, and there seemed a real threat of a conflict right across central America. The USA and the powerful banana companies watched events with concern, preparing to intervene if their interests were threatened by the coming conflict.

On July 28, former presidential candidate General Rafael Lopez Gutierrez launched a revolt with the express aim of overthrowing Bertrand. There were clashes almost immediately between government troops and rebels on the Nicaraguan border. Gutierrez and 200 of his supporters began a guerrilla campaign, attacking isolated government garrisons. In response, Bertrand jailed any supporters of opposition parties, filling the jails to overflowing. Any of his opponents who managed to escape the arrest squads took refuge in the US Legation.

## The Fighting

In the first days of August, anti-government guerrillas under General Gregorio Ferrara took several government strongholds in the east of Honduras. Another 800-man rebel force, commanded by Colonel Leopoldo Carbona, was defeated by government troops. In the Honduran capital, cadets from the artillery school rose in support of the rebels. They were soon put down by troops loyal to the president, but elsewhere, the rebel commander Colonel Vincente Tosta took the town of La Esperanza on August 5. He was forced to withdraw, however, when a large government force appeared in the area. The anti-Bertrand rebellion spread, with three departments and three towns declaring for the rebels. The forces of both sides were ill-disciplined and brittle, and neither seemed able to secure an advantage. On August 12, a large government force under Colonel Rosendo Fortin defeated a rebel army, whose troops ran away after only a few shots had been fired. Reports said that no rebel prisoners were taken, as they ran away so fast that none could be caught. But despite setbacks and poor training, weaponry, and discipline, the rebels seemed, somehow, to be winning. In late August, President Bertrand attempted to end the conflict, offering an amnesty to the rebels and safe conduct to their homes if they gave up the fight. The rebels, who were now advancing on the capital along the Atlantic coast, quickly rejected this offer. They took the towns of La Ceiba, Tela, Omoa, and Puerto Cortez in early September, and by the 10th, were five miles from Tegucigalpa. Bertrand now turned to the USA for support. The response simply told him to honor the constitution and remove some of the draconian measures he had introduced. The US Navy sent the USS Cleveland to the main Honduran banana processing facility at Puerto Cortes, but the message was clear. The USA had little interest in who held the presidency, as long their investments were secure. With little hope of outside support and his army deserting in large numbers, Bertrand realized the situation was hopeless and resigned his office on September 10. Eight days later, rebel General Gutierrez entered the capital and took the reins of power, upsetting some of his supporters.


CABOS Y SA

**The standard bearer and his guard of the Salvadorian Army’s NCO school are seen in the courtyard of their barracks in 1920. Like most other Central American armies in the 1920s, the army of El Salvador was small and its officers and NCOs were few in number. Although these young officers are smartly dressed, the majority of the Salvadorian Army wore a basic cotton uniform with unstiffened peaked caps. (Cody Images)**

They had not overthrown one overbearing dictator to replace him with another, and as September passed, opposition to Gutierrez and his clique grew. Opposition coalesced around Dr Alberto Membreno, a former Honduran vice-president who returned from exile to lead the rebels. His forces and commanders were an unlikely mixture of Bertrand supporters and some of those who had fought them only a month before. While the rebels made gains in southern Honduras, Gutierrez strengthened his hold on power, with the support of the newly promoted General Tosta and his 5,000-strong army. Tosta nominated Gutierrez as candidate for president and took the position of war minister for himself. Elections were held at the end of the year and Gutierrez was duly elected and then inaugurated on February 1, 1920. Within days, there was an upsurge in the rebellion that had been simmering since late 1919. Nicaragua was reported to be supporting the rebels with rifles and ammunition, but not much else. In mid-February, rebel forces captured three towns close to the border with Nicaragua, but President Gutierrez bided his time in far-off Tegucigalpa. He ordered martial law imposed in the capital and mobilized his forces in preparation for an offensive against the rebels. He also began a diplomatic exchange with the Nicaraguan president and received assurances that no more arms would be supplied to the rebels. With no support from Nicaragua, the rebel cause’s fate was sealed, and by early March, its troops began seeking sanctuary across the border. Although the victorious Gutierrez felt reasonably secure, he knew that he could not survive long as a dictator. He felt he needed some sort of consensus and mandate from the people of Honduras and withdrew martial law and released all political prisoners from jail.

## The Coto War of 1921

The war fought between the Central American states of Costa Rica and Panama in February 1921 was over the disputed district of Coto Valley and its surrounding region. On a map of Central America, it is not immediately clear why two countries would wage war over such an apparently insignificant piece of land only 50 miles by 30. But Costa Rica and Panama clearly felt it was significant. The region had been awarded to Costa Rica by the 1910 Anderson-Porras Treaty, but Panama still disputed Costa Rican rights to the region and maintained forces there. Both were poor countries and their military expenditure tiny. The regular Costa Rican Army numbered a mere 400 men in 1921 but plans existed to expand this force in time of war. They possessed thousands of Mauser rifles, dozens of machine guns, and several artillery pieces, from the era when the army had been much larger, stored for just such a contingency. If Costa Rica’s military might was limited, it was impressive in contrast to that of Panama. Their army had been disbanded, at the insistence of the USA, in 1904 so it could represent no threat to the newly built Panama Canal (see Chapter 1). The army had been replaced by a poorly armed and trained National Guard with few rifles. Most arms and ammunition from the old army had been sold abroad for desperately needed foreign income. All remaining rifles had been surrendered in 1916, on the orders of the USA, when a stray bullet from one killed a US Marine. With the approach of war, Panama converted its national police force into a military unit overnight, armed with 50 rifles and 60,000 rounds, secreted in the cellars of the presidential palace. A number of patriotic volunteer units were raised in Panama City to send to the Cota Region, including the Primera de Voluntarios de David and the “Joan of Arc Company,” the latter raised by university students. Although these volunteers clamored to be sent to the front line, the war did not last long enough for them to play a part in the fighting. During the war the Panamanians managed to capture a few Springfield M1903 rifles with around 60 rounds each, a few Mauser rifles, and one precious machine gun with 6,000 rounds. Panama also bought 50 carbines from a private company, Arias & Duque. On February 21, a few dozen Costa Ricans marched into Coto, “capturing” it from a single Panamanian official and a policeman. When news of this outrage reached Panama City, an expeditionary force was quickly raised from amongst the scandalized population. The very next day, February 22, a small Panamanian force, under the command of Captain Grimaldo and two lieutenants, left La Concepcion by train. The force consisted of around 60 policemen armed from the cache in the presidential palace. On returning to La Concepcion, the train was due to collect the 1st Company of

Primera de Voluntarios de David as additional reinforcements. Another tiny volunteer unit, the “13 Volunteers of Bugaba,” reportedly armed with machetes and a total of two aged shotguns, also started to make its way to the front line. The next day, an additional force of 53 armed police, under Second Lieutenant Mejias, left Panama City by boat. They were relatively well armed with Springfield M1903 carbines and 60 rounds each. Panama had raised a total of 1,700 men to fight from a variety of volunteer units. Although larger, the Costa Rican force of 2,000 was only marginally better organized than the Panamanians. Many of the troops on both sides never reached the front line in Coto, and the bulk of the fighting was between a few hundred men on each side. The fighting began in earnest on February 26, when a Panamanian force pushed the Costa Ricans back, capturing 200 men and their officers. These prisoners were sent to the island of Taboga, where they were interned until the war ended a few weeks later. On March 2, one of the largest encounters of the war, a two-hour jungle firefight, took place, leaving 24 Panamanian dead and a similar number of Costa Ricans also killed.

In March 1921, a second front was opened, on the northern coast of the isthmus in the Bocas Del Toro Province, when 1,000 Costa Ricans invaded Panamanian territory. There were only a few dozen Panamanians to face this invasion, as all their available forces were already committed in the south. The war ended on March 5, with both nation’s limited resources exhausted as the initial war fever waned.

The fact that a relatively small train accident caused one of the greatest losses of life in this war gives some idea of the small scale of the fighting. On March 18, the end carriage of a train, containing ammunition and a number of Panamanian officers, broke loose and crashed down a hillside. Two colonels and two junior officers were killed, and another colonel and a captain injured. This crash had cost the Panamanians a significant number of senior officers but, thankfully for Panama, the war was now over. The presidents of both nations made political capital out of the war, even though the US-brokered agreement left Costa Rica in charge of Coto. Panama was forced to fully accept the 1910 agreement, as the USA was not willing to risk a threat to its interests in the region.

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**This photograph, taken in late March 1921, shows Costa Rican troops preparing to board two launches, the Vanguardia and Looner, to travel by river to the front line in Coto. The soldiers wear improvised uniforms, including straw sun hats, white cotton shirts, and light-colored cotton trousers. It is shocking to realize that the Costa Rican Army was better prepared for their war than the Panamanian forces. Officers of both armies appear to have worn bow ties as an indication of their rank, or perhaps just because they had more style than the other ranks. (Author's Collection)**

## The Paraguayan Civil War 1922–23

The Paraguayan Civil War of 1922–23 began, as these conflicts often did, with a political clash between a group of politicians who all felt they should hold the post of president. After the civil war of 1912, the Liberal Party had split into two factions, the Radicals and the Civicos. In turn, the Radicals were divided between the two leading figures in their movement – Manuel Gondra and Eduardo Schaerer. In late 1921, when no senior politician was willing to accept the post, a compromise candidate, Eusebio Ayala, was made provisional president. Given the ongoing in-fighting between the rival politicians, Ayala felt the responsible thing to do was to cancel or veto the forthcoming election. The country's Congress, which was dominated by supporters of Eduardo Schaerer, called on the army to restore the constitution by force. All political parties were now split between "Loyalists" and "Constitutionalists" – the former supporters of Ayala as president, the latter defending the constitution they claimed was threatened by Ayala's move to delay elections. In 1922 the country split, with two of the five military districts – 2nd and 4th – siding with the Constitutionalists, later joined by the 1st Military District. This gave the rebel Constitutionalist Army a strength of 1,700 men, including two regular infantry battalions, a rifle company, two squadrons of cavalry, and a few heavy machine gun units. The rebels also had two batteries of Vickers 75mm 01 mountain guns, giving them an advantage over the government forces in artillery as well as machine guns. President Ayala's Loyalist forces totaled only 600 troops – one company of infantry, one section of machine guns, two squadrons of cavalry (including the Presidential Escort), some engineers, the cadets from the Military Academy, and crucially the 250-man Paraguayan Navy with its four gunboats and armed patrol craft.

**Paraguayan rebel troops armed with a Maxim heavy machine gun protect the railway running between Caballero and Sapucai during the 1922 civil war. The armies fighting in the civil war in July 1922 varied in size from less than a hundred to several thousand men. Machine guns were an important weapon during the civil war and the rebel Constitutionalist Army only had 11 of these Maxims by December 1922. (Collection Javier Yubi)**

# The Air War

Although both sides employed aircraft during the Paraguayan Civil War, the air war was limited by the small number of planes available in 1922. Initially, the government acquired a British Armstrong Whitworth FK8 reconnaissance plane, which was transported up river without wings and propeller and then assembled by the British pilot and mechanic who had arrived with it. The government air arm was strengthened significantly in June by the arrival of additional pilots, a few Argentinians and an Italian veteran of World War I. They brought with them a French SPAD fighter, two Italian SAML A.3 fighter bombers, two Italian Ansaldo SVA 5 fighter bombers, and a single Ansaldo SVA 10 bomber. The new air fleet’s first “attacks” were dropping leaflets over rebel lines urging them to surrender. A bombing raid by two of the aircraft went terribly wrong when the train they attacked turned out to be full of Loyalist prisoners taken by the rebels. Constitutionalist attempts to acquire their own aircraft failed when an Italian pilot flying an SVA 5 from Argentina to their lines was forced to crash land en route. They finally managed to hire their own mercenary pilots in July, who brought three SVA 5 fighters and an SVA 10 bomber from Argentina. The Loyalist air force was also reinforced around this time by the arrival of two more Italian pilots, including the World War I ace Cosimo Damiano Rizzoto. During the 1915–18 fighting, Rizzoto had shot down five Austro-Hungarian planes, and he arrived with a French Breguet 14 bomber, purchased for him by the government in Argentina. Also at this time, British pilot Patrick Hassett arrived to fly for the Loyalists, and in late August took part in the first aerial dogfight in Latin America. Both sides now began a series of bombing raids that enemy fighters sought to intercept. In the ensuing dogfights, the more experienced Loyalist pilots proved their superiority, leading several rebel pilots to desert the cause. By late October, the remaining rebel pilots had lost heart and their air fleet reduced to only two operational aircraft. These were captured by Loyalist forces in November and the only remaining rebel plane, their SVA 10, was grounded due to lack of spare parts.

## The Rebel and Loyalist 1922 Offensives

During the civil war, the rebels launched two offensives against the Paraguayan capital, the first in late May 1922 being delayed by abortive peace negotiations. When the rebel army reached the suburbs of Asuncion, they were faced by a Loyalist army of 600 regulars. This small force was reinforced by 1,000 armed workers from the anarcho-syndicalist Marine Workers Union, as well as other civilian government supporters. Officers for the civilian volunteers came from amongst the pupils of the Army's

Military College in Asuncion. Having expected to take the capital with little resistance, by mid-June the rebel army was forced to withdraw back to their base at Paranguai. Loyalist forces then launched a counter-offensive with two separate 1,500-strong armies, one commanded by a rising star, Captain Jose Felix Estigarribia, who would achieve fame in the Chaco War (see Chapter 7). Both forces consisted of three infantry battalions, one cavalry squadron, a battery of mountain guns, and a company of heavy machine guns. On July 14, as the Loyalists advanced along the railway line from Asuncion towards Paranguai, the rebel commander loaded his troops onto trains, along with all their artillery and machine guns, falling back to their last remaining base at Villarica. Throughout July, the Loyalist advance continued, capturing rebel-held towns and villages along the route. By the end of the month, only Villarica remained in rebel hands, although some scattered groups of guerrillas continued the fight in the desert regions. Villarica fell on July 31 and to all appearances the rebellion was finished, with only a few scattered units still resisting. With a few hundred Constitutionalist troops still in the field, fighting continued throughout the summer and autumn of 1922. Somehow, in late 1922 and early 1923, the rebels somehow managed to regroup, recruiting more troops in preparation for another offensive against Asunicion.

**Young Paraguayan soldiers of the Constitutional Army lounge around before going into action during the chaotic 1922 civil war. The rebel forces were armed with the same type of rifles as their Loyalist opponents. A few of these men, however, appear to be armed with Russian Mosin-Nagant M1891 rifles from some unknown source. Some Russian rifles were produced in the USA for Imperial Russia pre-1917, and these could be leftover rifles from that contract. During the war, the Loyalist forces purchased 3,000 Mauser rifles, 12 machine guns, and large amounts of ammunition from Chile. The rebels were also able to purchase 1,500 Mauser rifles during the war, but they bought theirs from Argentina. (Cody Images)**

**A nervous-looking young female soldier of the Constitutionalist forces during the 1924 civil war in Honduras is encouraged to show off her rifle by her male comrades. Her Remington rolling block rifle was produced in large numbers from the 1860s onwards and armed most Latin American nations. It was still in service in the 1920s and 1930s with several of the Central American states like Honduras that could not afford to replace them. (Cody Images)**

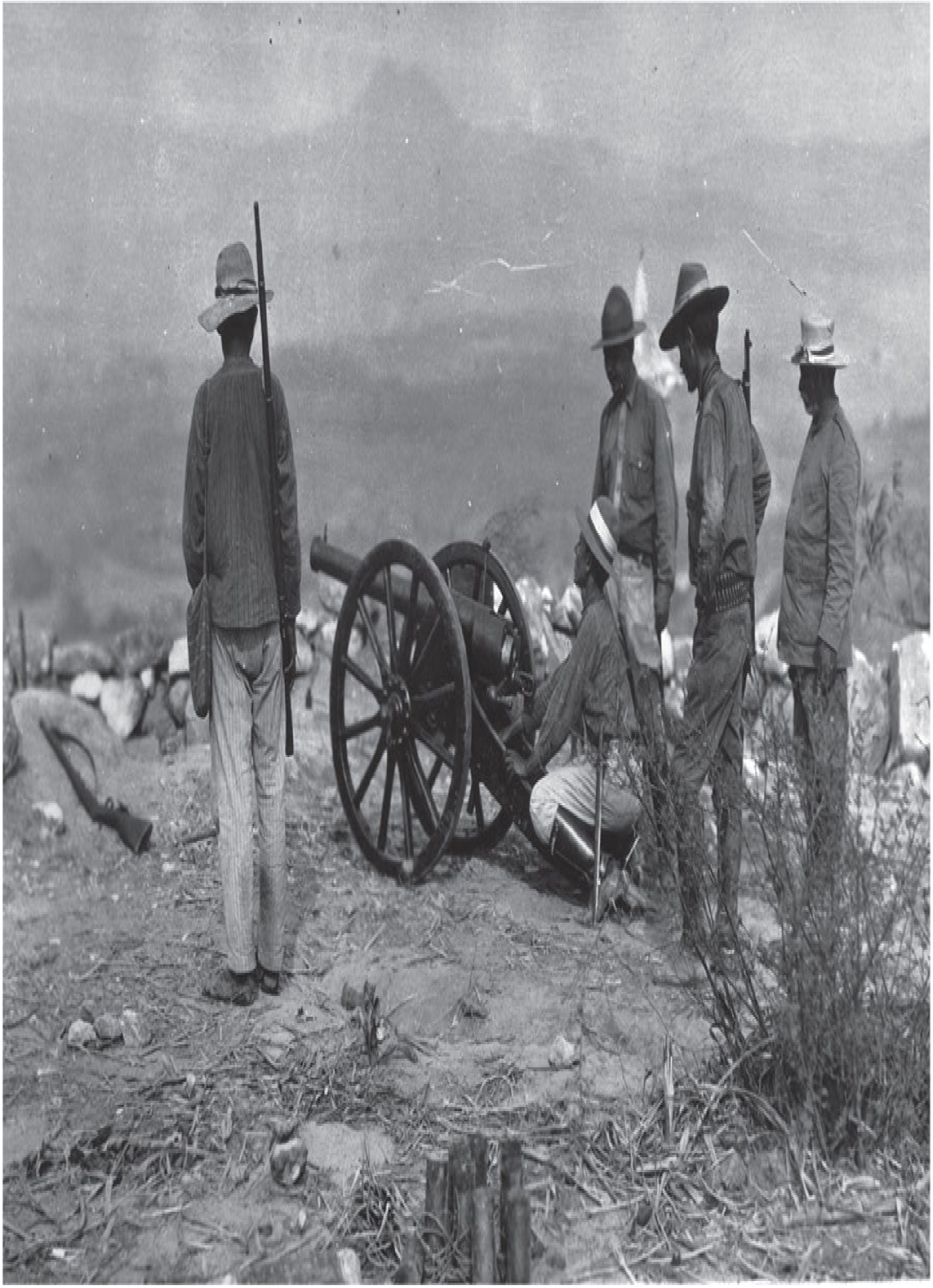
## The 1923 Fighting

The first few months of 1923 saw a number of skirmishes between Loyalist armies and the revitalized Constitutionalist forces. In early 1923, President Eusebio Ayala had resigned due to ill health and was replaced by the finance minister, Eligio Ayala. Although nepotism was rife in Latin American politics, in this case the new incumbent was not related to the old president. The Constitutionalist commander, Colonel Adolfo Chirife, had succumbed to pneumonia and was replaced by General Pedro Mendoza, who ordered a new offensive against Asuncion in May. This time Mendoza planned to lead Constitutionalist forces on a long march through dense jungle to avoid contact with the Loyalists. This tortuous march was achieved without any substantial engagements between the Constitutionalist and Loyalist forces. Loyalist intelligence had failed to locate the advancing Constitutionalist forces and, although Ayala’s army advanced in their general direction, the two armies passed each other in the dense jungle. By early July, the rebels were on the outskirts of the defenseless capital. By July 9, the rebels had pushed into the center of the capital, encountering, and defeating, only a small force of police during their advance. President Ayala’s government had already quit Asuncion, taking the National Treasury. When Loyalist forces counterattacked, however, the rebels were revealed to be almost out of ammunition and had no choice but to retreat. A second Loyalist army under Estigarribia arrived outside the capital and the morale of the rebels disintegrated. Rebel troops panicked and it was every man for himself as they fled the capital in small armed groups. A last organized remnant of the Constitutionalist Army did escape Asuncion, marching for the Argentine border, where they laid down their weapons and crossed into exile.

# Civil War in Honduras 1924

In early 1924 the troubled country of Honduras was on the verge of yet another military struggle for the presidency. Between 1920 and 1923, there had been an astonishing 17 uprisings against the government, although most were small scale, local conflicts. The “armies” engaged in this endemic fighting were described at the time as some of the worst in the world. One commentator described the average Honduran soldier of 1924 as “half naked and starved” and “a simple pile of cannon fodder.” The soldiers were said to be more comfortable using a machete than their rifles, for which they often had no ammunition anyway. Officers had little formal training, and many were reported to be Nicaraguans and Salvadorian mercenaries. The Honduran Army possessed little heavy weaponry, having 13 Maxim-Becker and a similar number of M1895 machine guns. They also had four 42mm infantry guns and 16 mountain guns of various obsolete models. President Lopez Gutierrez had been in power since October 1920 and, in early 1924, his term of office was coming to an end. He agreed there should be an election but refused to name a date and announced he would remain in office until the promised election could be organized, outraging opposition politicians. As was common in Latin America, a general with presidential ambitions, Tiburcio Carias Andino, decided to solve the problem militarily. Beginning in February, the rebel army, led by a group of officers loyal to Andino, began to attack government garrisons. There were five battles between pro and anti-Gutierrez forces in February alone, with the largest taking place at Santa Rosa. In this rebel victory, an ad-hoc force of 800 hastily recruited Indians defeated 3,000 government troops. President Gutierrez’s army retreated to the fortified capital at Tegucigalpa after a defeat in the battle of La Ceiba on February 28. Many Federal Army officers now abandoned their troops, fleeing for the safety of the Guatemalan border. The rebel advance on Tegucigalpa was the backdrop for a small “air war.” Two rebel aircraft, flown by American pilots, attacked the city, dropping bombs by hand. They were confronted by a single Bristol F2 B fighter flown by a Canadian, but there is no record of any air-to-air combat. March saw further government defeats and, in the capital, they waited for the arrival of the rebel armies, now closing in from various directions. The assault on Tegucigalpa was delayed while the rebels called in forces from across

Honduras. President Gutierrez had already left the capital, taking refuge in the town of Ampala en route to the border, where he died of diabetes. The rebels entered the capital on April 23, and a temporary truce was arranged. General Vicente Tosca, a rebel general, was named provisional president. Months of heated negotiations in the capital followed and a new outbreak of fighting looked likely. When it came, it was from an unexpected source, however. After arguing with some of his comrades and General Tosta in particular, one rebel commander, General Gregorio Ferrera, left the capital in early August, taking with him a large number of troops and enough arms and ammunition to support his rebellion. Four hundred of these rebels, under General Julio Peralta, a Ferrerra supporter, attacked Santa Rosa a few days later. In a battle typical of the civil war, a few hundred men, with a handful of M1895 machine guns and mountain guns on each side, clashed in an eventual stalemate. Peralta’s rebels withdrew to lick their wounds and the two armies did not face each other again for two months. On October 22, the rebel army, commanded by General Ferrera himself, engaged a government army at Ajuterizwe. The government army was commanded by President Tosta in person, determined to finish off his former comrade. In yet another costly battle, 600 troops were killed, and the rebels fled the battlefield. General Ferrera, having lost the support of both officers and men, gave up the struggle, but not his ambitions for the presidency. He would die during a further rebellion in western Honduras in 1931.



**The original caption to this photograph from the Honduran Civil War says "Ancient Gun used by Honduran Rebels." This Constitutionalist army seven pounder screw gun is positioned on a hilltop overlooking the Honduran capital Tegucigalpa, which is held by the Loyalist forces of President Gutierrez. The soldiers are wearing a mix of civilian and military clothing, although the rank and file usually wore their own clothes. During the numerous civil wars in Central America in the 1920s and 1930s, often the only distinguishing feature between the two armies was the color of the men's hat bands. (Author's Collection)**

**These officer cadets are drilling at “Chorrillas,” the “West Point” of the Peruvian Army in April 1925. While their officers wear dress uniforms, the cadets in the front rows are wearing a rather archaic-looking fatigue uniform. At the time this photograph was taken, the US president, Calvin Coolidge, was about to make a decision regarding a border dispute between Peru and Chile. As the appointed arbiter of the so-called Tacna–Arica dispute, Coolidge was trying to stop the two countries from going to war. (Cody Images)**

## “Red Against Blue” – The Nicaraguan Constitutionalist War 1926–27

Nicaragua’s fragile democracy had confronted numerous political and military crises during the first two decades of the 20th century. The election of 1924 was seen as a chance to bring stable democracy to the poverty-stricken country. The Conservative Party had ruled Nicaragua since 1910 and jealously guarded power. Rivalry between the two democratic parties had, over the years, often spiraled into armed conflict. The Liberals and Conservatives often seemed to resemble armed camps more than democratic political parties. The country was shocked when the result of the 1924 election led to the formation of a coalition government. The Conservative Carlos Solorzano became president with the Liberal Juan B. Sarcasa as vice-president. There seemed a genuine chance for stable government in Nicaragua. US confidence in the new government led the Marines, stationed in the country since 1912, to withdraw in early August 1925. Briefly, the country seemed stable and at peace. The illusion was shattered when, in the aftermath of the US withdrawal, a right-wing coup rocked Managua on October 25. Emiliano Chamorro – a former Conservative president – and Adolfo Diaz seized the fortress dominating Managua with a force of ultra-right-wingers. Both the president and vice-president were forced into exile, outraging Liberal supporters who were prepared to fight to restore democracy. Although their party had co-operated in the coalition government, most Conservative supporters strongly opposed it. Civil war broke out when, on May 2, 1926, exiled Liberal supporters landed at the eastern port of Bluefields. Supporters of the two rival parties would fight it out across Nicaragua for a year in this so-called “Constitutionalist War.” No sooner were the Liberals secure at Bluefields than they established an alternative Nicaraguan government led by the returning Sacasa. When the Liberals took the port, they looted the local branch of the National Bank, adding $160,000 to their slender war chest. The Liberals were able to assemble several forces, each of a few hundred men, armed with rifles supplied by Mexico. Several officers of the Mexican Federal Army, officially “on leave,” were sent to aid the Liberals as advisors. The main 3,000-man Liberal army, under Jose Maria Moncada, began operating all along the eastern coastline, with Bluefields as its base. They were described as a “motley” collection, with many women and young boys amongst them. Before long Moncada’s troops had taken the towns of Rama, La Cruz, the Bluff, and Puerto Cabezos. In addition numerous Liberal bands, some in truth little more than bandit gangs, were at large. One unit, raised by Anastasio Somoza Garcia, operated in the south-west of Nicaragua, while another band, around 100-strong and commanded by Augusto Cesar Sandino, fought with some success. Sandino disliked Moncada, and their mutual mistrust would come to a head in the aftermath of the war. At least 12 Liberal bands, each under its own guerrilla chieftain, were formed in western Nicaragua as the war continued. These Liberal forces, operating with no particular coordination, confronted various right-wing armed groups supportive of the Conservative government. The Conservative armed bands took revenge on any community they regarded as pro-Liberal. Robbery, looting, and rape were the usual methods used to terrorize the local populace, although this brutality was not exclusive to the right-wing bands.

**These young city workers in Managua center are armed Conservative supporters preparing to defend the capital against Liberal attack during the 1926–27 Nicaraguan Civil War. Both sides in the civil war armed their supporters, but few of them received training, and were sent into action usually having never fired their weapons. They are all armed with the Krag-Jorgensen M1895 rifle, which was now being phased out in US Army service. (Photo by NY Daily News Archive via Getty Images)**

Chamorro sought to counter the Liberal forces by combining his National Guard units with Conservative irregulars into an expeditionary corps. The lack of a national army meant that, in reality, almost all fighting on both sides was done by irregulars. Most combatants wore civilian clothing, the only distinguishing insignia being the color of their hat bands – blue for Conservative, red for Liberal. Both sides were equipped with a few machine guns, and there were a handful of light cannon and Hotchkiss guns left over from the fighting in the 1900s. Moncada’s army began pushing west towards Managua, opposed by small forces of Conservative irregulars. This inconclusive low-level fighting continued throughout 1926. The USA, concerned as usual to protect its interests, wanted to prevent the escalation of the war and brokered a truce in October. This rapidly collapsed, and sporadic clashes of a few hundred men continued. While these skirmishes rumbled on, a significant clash took place in early 1927 at the city of Chinandega, in the far west of Nicaragua. Although small by conventional standards, Chinandega turned into the largest battle of the civil war. The Conservative garrison of 500 men faced a superior Liberal army under Francisco Parajon. Figures of 2,000 Liberal troops were almost certainly exaggerated, and a force of between 600 and 1,000 is more likely. During the three-day battle, the city was largely destroyed by Conservative government air force light-bombers, flown by US mercenary pilots. The city suffered further when the Liberal army advanced into the outskirts of the city before being driven out by Conservative counterattacks. As they withdrew, frustrated Liberal troops looted the homes and businesses of what they assumed were Conservative supporters. When the fighting ended on February 9, several hundred men had been killed and the Liberal army forced to withdraw from the city completely.

**These soldiers in the Nicaraguan jungle are supporters of the Liberal cause during the 1926–27 civil war. A right-wing coup overthrew the elected president and caused armed resistance by the Liberal Party to begin immediately. The clothing of these soldiers shows that most Liberal soldiers came from the impoverished section of Nicaraguan society. Although the men do not appear to have any insignia, they do have a red and black flag that symbolized the left wing in Nicaragua. Fighting between the Conservatives and Liberals lasted from May 1926 until May 1927 and ended with a US-brokered agreement. (Bettmann/Getty Images)**

PILO
CUERPO MILITAR
DE AVIACION
GOBI

**In February 1927, the commander-in-chief of the Nicaraguan Government army, Major-General Diaz, prepares to go on a reconnaissance flight during the Constitutionalist War. He is being flown by Major Lee Mason, head of the Nicaraguan Air Force, on a reconnaissance flight over the battlefield at Chinangdega. The general, who was a relative of President Adolfo Diaz, wants to see how his 500 Conservative troops defending the town are faring against the 600–2,000-strong Liberal army. It seems ridiculous that the effective commanders of the government army and air force are taking part in such a dangerous mission. (Cody Images)**

The Liberal reverse at Chinandega did not alter the broader picture and their forces continued to advance on the capital, Managua. The USA saw the Liberal ascendancy in the civil war and the prospect of a Mexican-backed Liberal government in Nicaragua as a threat to their lucrative business interests in the country. In a pattern that would become familiar, the US moved to undermine the Liberal position. A total of 2,000 Marines landed at various points in the country and then seized control of all the main ports of Nicaragua, establishing “neutral zones.” As in Honduras in 1912, this move by the US forced the provisional Liberal government and its forces to move away from the coast. The US hoped that by starving the Liberal forces of supplies, including arms, they could create at least a stalemate. The Liberals had no illusions that the US backed the Conservatives; indeed, it was common knowledge that US Marine pilots had been flying missions for the Nicaraguan Government. Although they would welcome a Conservative victory, the US did not want to become too deeply embroiled. President Coolidge was concerned enough, however, to send one of his most able diplomats, Henry. L. Stimson, on a peace mission. Stimson met the rebel leader Moncada at the town of Tipitapa on May 4, 1927. After some discussion, Moncada agreed to end the fighting in an agreement known as the “Peace of Tipitapa,” accepting reluctantly that one of the leaders of the ultra-right-wing coup, Adolfo Diaz, would remain in office until an election could be held in 1928, supervised by the US. Both sides were to hand in all their weapons, amounting to 3,704 rifles from the Liberals and 10,445 rifles from the Conservatives. Many Liberals saw Moncada’s concessions as a betrayal of their long struggle and some were simply not prepared to accept the US-imposed fait accompli. They kept their weapons and awaited a renewal of the fighting.

# The Sandino Rebellion 1927–33

With the end of the Constitutionalist War, most Liberal commanders accepted the peace treaty, but several, who saw the treaty as a betrayal, found a charismatic leader to continue the rebellion against the government, and now its US supporters.

This maverick commander was Augusto Cesar Sandino. A reluctant supporter of the Liberals during the war, Sandino had originally wanted to fight the government independently. He and his small band had joined the Liberals and fought for them but now he refused to accept the Peace of Tipitapa deal and, in July 1927, led his small band of guerrilla fighters into the Nicaraguan jungle. They established a base there, close to the Honduran border, and prepared to fight their Nicaraguan enemies and the US Marines supporting them. Sandino was desperately short of rifles and weaponry of all sorts from the very beginning, and his men relied on what they captured from the Guardia Nacional, local Nicaraguans trained by US Marines. He had managed to salvage 30 rifles and 6,000 rounds of ammunition thrown into a harbor at the end of the civil war, and by January 1928, despite his lack of men and weapons, Sandino controlled three northern Nicaraguan departments. He was a master of propaganda and claimed to have 3,000 armed men under his command. In reality, he could field around 400 men and had only 100 in many “battles” with the US Marines. During 1928 and 1929, the war was characterized by a series of skirmishes usually resulting in a handful of casualties. At the battle of Bramadero in February 1928, for instance, 200 rebels attacked a US Marine supply convoy. A major government offensive followed in March, where 5,480 Marines and Guardia Nacional spent eight months chasing Sandino and his men around hundreds of miles of jungle. In April, during this offensive, 150 rebels seized the La Luz Mine, and in May, 100 men ambushed a 36-strong Marine force. Meanwhile, Sandino evaded the Marines by splitting his army into three mobile columns, each with 80 soldiers, six officers, and ten bodyguards. For the rest of the year, Sandino and his various armed bands continued their low-level campaign, while he grew increasingly frustrated with the lack of support from the Nicaraguan people. In early 1929, his band attacked the city of Yali, killing three US Marines before withdrawing into the jungle. In a surprise move, Sandino left Nicaragua in February 1929, travelling to Mexico in the hope of gaining support from their government. The insurgency did not come to an end with his departure, and continued under the leadership of Pedron Altamirano. During 1929, the Guardia Nacional and pro-government paramilitaries did most of the government’s fighting.

**Augusto Cesar Sandino (1895– 1934) was the only Liberal officer from the 1926–27 civil war who was unwilling to accept the peace agreement between the two warring parties. Instead, he went into the jungle with a few supporters and began a guerrilla campaign that was to last from 1927 until 1933. He fought against the Nicaraguan Government and the US Marines who were sent to support them, often with a few hundred men. Sandino gave his army the grand title of "The Army in the Defense of the National Sovereignty of Nicaragua." He did not have universal support amongst the Nicaraguan peasants, some of whom were deeply conservative by nature. When he was betrayed and assassinated with US approval in 1934, he became a revolutionary symbol for many in Latin America. (Cody Images)**

**A band of Sandinista fighters proudly show off their weaponry to the press during the early fighting against the National Guard and US Marines in 1927. Pride of place goes to a couple of Thompson sub-machine guns captured from American Marines in a skirmish. At the end of the war the Sandinistas handed in eight of these Thompsons, along with eight Browning automatic rifles, nine Browning machine guns, and two Lewis guns. The majority of Sandino's men, however, were armed with older rifles, often taken from Nicaraguan National Guardsmen or right-wing militia. (Photo by Universal History Archive/UIG via Getty Images)**

## The US Marines and Guardia Nacional

The bulk of the fighting against Sandino was done by US Marines, redeployed to Nicaragua to counter his "liberation" campaign. US Marine strength in Nicaragua fluctuated, from about 1,500 in 1926 to 2,500 in 1928, reaching a peak of 5,000 by early 1929. With the war against Sandino apparently won, Marine numbers declined sharply during 1929. The number was down to 3,100 by May, 2,555 by July, and 1,300 by August. A key asset for the Marines during the rebellion was the air power available to them. Initially only six scout planes, by 1933 there were 26 planes of various types in service in Nicaragua. Although the Marines bore the brunt of the fighting, the longterm plan was to train the National Guard and other anti-Sandino Nicaraguan forces to a level where they could combat Sandino's forces. The Nicaraguan Government forces consisted primarily of the Guardia Nacional, initially numbering 600 men, trained and armed by the US Marines. By 1929, National Guard numbers had risen to 2,000 well-trained officers and men, armed with Springfield M1903 rifles and light and heavy machine guns. They were supported by a few hundred poorly armed and trained volunteers known as the "Guardia Voluntarios." There were also a few independent armed bands of Conservative supporters from the Constitutionalist War. These irregulars were vehemently anti-Sandino, and little mercy was shown to captives by either side during the fighting.

## Sandino’s Return

Having failed to win support from the Mexican Government, Sandino, living in Yucatan in southern Mexico at this point, pondered his future. Remaining in Mexico would mean poorly paid work and a life of obscurity, or he could return to Nicaragua and continue the struggle. There was really no decision to make. He returned from Mexico on May 1930, without fanfare or publicity; indeed, his presence in the country was not confirmed until mid-June. Sandino had learned much from his conversations with revolutionaries in Mexico and he now looked to put their advice into practice. He sought to raise more recruits for his outnumbered army by promising loot and land to volunteers rather than just extolling the virtues of revolution. Sandino’s return did give the rebels new impetus, and they launched an offensive, which lasted through July and August. A worrying new factor for Sandino was the appearance of a number of self-declared “rebel” bands. Although they claimed to be fighting for Sandino, many were, in reality, glorified bandits whose actions tarnished the image of the rebels. Their only benefit was to tie down some of the Marines and Guardia Nacional units, allowing the rebels to gain a few victories. These included the battle of Ocotal in December 1930, when a force of rebels killed eight out of ten US Marines in a well-organized ambush. The steady trickle of losses made the US Government rethink their policy towards Nicaragua and look for an exit strategy. Meanwhile, Sandino realized that although his men had been able to hold their own during 1930 and into 1931, he could never win this “David and Goliath” struggle militarily. His only hope was to wear down the Nicaraguan Government and their US allies by winning the propaganda war. Here he sought to exaggerate any triumph, no matter how small, and convince the enemy that he would never give up the fight. If he could convince friendly governments that he commanded a large “liberation” army, he might receive the substantial material support he needed. Sandino would exaggerate the strength of his forces, while at the same time removing any friendly casualties from the battlefield to disguise his losses. In January 1931, the government launched a major offensive against the rebels, which ultimately failed, leaving Sandino in a stronger military position by the end of the year. He was now being outmaneuvered politically, however, as the US announced, in early 1932, that they would withdraw their Marines after a general election in November. In April, Sandino sought to strengthen his position with a “victory” offensive towards the cities of central Nicaragua. This rebel offensive fizzled out by the end of June, and they spent the rest of the summer and autumn attacking government strongholds in a series of “irritation” raids. With no hope of final victory in sight, the faint-hearted amongst the rebels began to drift away. Sandino’s men shot any deserters caught. Regardless, several of Sandino’s commanders gave up the fight during 1932.

**US Marine officers stand on parade with their recently recruited Guardia Voluntarios, or GV, who were raised as an auxiliary force to support the Nicaraguan National Guard. The GV were given basic training and a Krag-Jorgensen M1898 rifle and sent out on patrol. They would usually go on operations along with National Guardsmen and their US Marine advisors. Recruits for the GV came from amongst the anti-Sandino peasantry or from amongst the unemployed simply looking for a wage. (Library of Congress)**

US Marines in the early 1930s proudly pose with a captured Sandinista flag on the parade ground of their barracks in Nicaragua. The flag is divided into two halves with the red and black colors of world anarchism and revolution, and has a white skull and crossed swords. By this time the Marines and the Nicaraguan National Guard had the upper hand in their fight against Augusto Sandino and his men. (Library of Congress)

**Two US Marine pilots, Captain J. E. Davis and Lieutenant Christian F. Schilt, are seen at the side of their aircraft in Nicaragua. These men, along with other Marine pilots, were to spend years perfecting the art of supplying troops from the air. They developed methods of dropping supplies to isolated Marine units that would be used by other armies for years to come. Schilt received the Medal of Honor for his bravery during his service in Nicaragua, where ground fire from Sandinista guerrillas downed several US planes. (Library of Congress)**

## The End

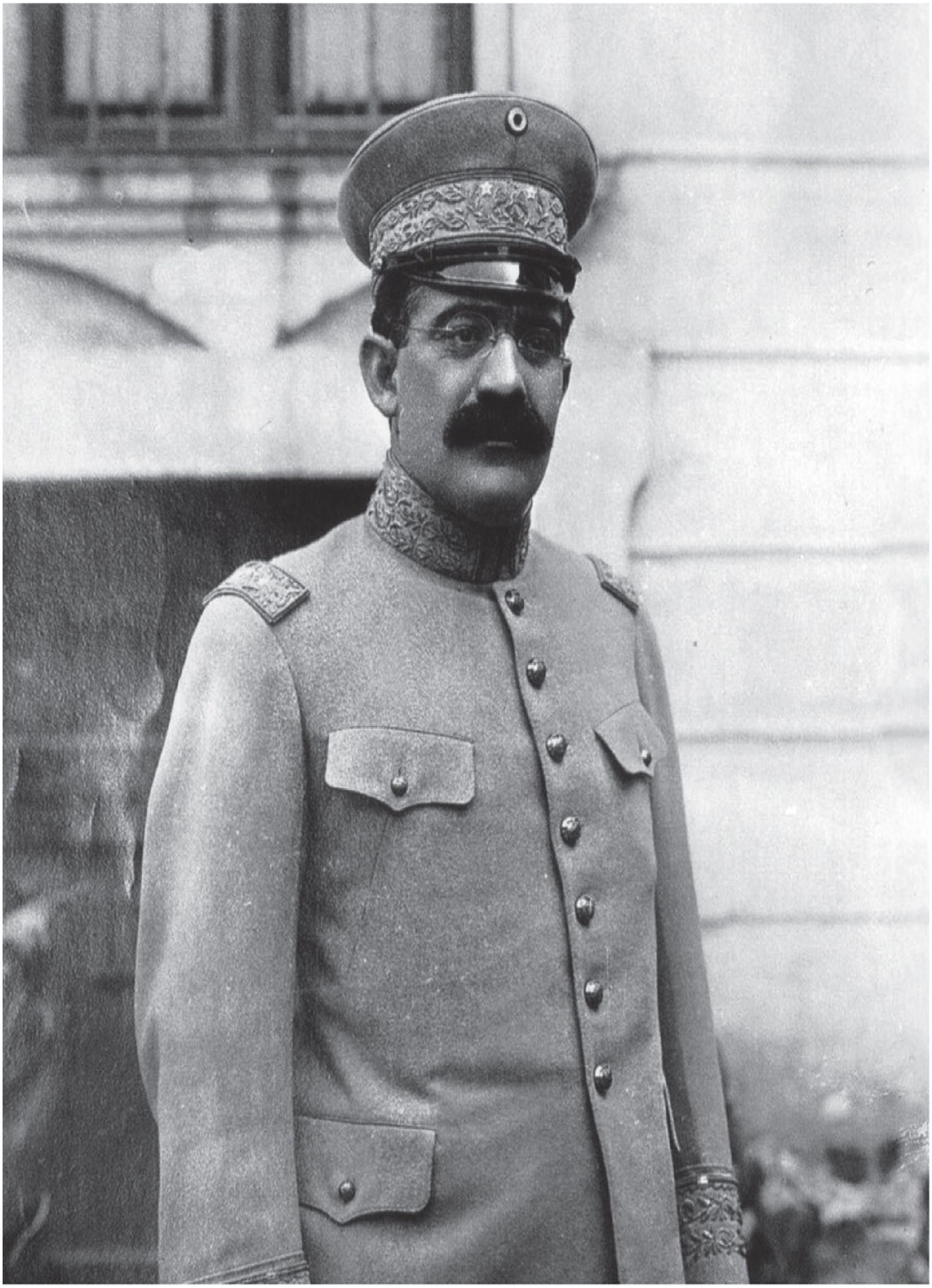
In November 1932, a US-brokered general election saw the Liberal Sacasa elected as president. Sandino now realized he had little justification for continuing his military campaign and agreed to make peace with the new government. On January 25, 1933, he informed the government that he wanted to make peace, and on February 2, flew to Managua for talks. Under the terms of the agreement, Sandino’s men were to be granted an amnesty and their leader was to be allowed to retain a personal guard of 100 men. Sandino agreed to the handover of most of his arms and to the surrender of his remaining 1,800 men. The Sandinista weapons surrendered included 335 rifles, six shotguns, eight Thompson sub-machine guns, eight Browning automatic rifles, nine Browning heavy machine guns, two Lewis light machine guns, and 3,129 rounds of ammunition. Despite having made peace with the government, Sandino’s enemies viewed him as too great a threat and the commander of the Guardia Nacional, General Anastasio Somoza Garcia – a name that would become infamous – set about organizing his murder. In 1934, Sandino was arrested as he left a meeting and swiftly assassinated, along with his brother and two of his generals. Without their leader, Sandino’s remaining armed followers were extremely vulnerable. The National Guard immediately attacked any bands they could track down and destroyed them in a little over a month. Two years later, having bided his time, General Somoza led a military coup, which overthrew the elected government. Somoza established a brutal regime that held power for over 40 years, with his son taking over when Somoza was assassinated. Although not well known generally outside Latin America, Sandino’s name is still revered on the political left. His name and image returned to prominence in the late 1970s when modern Sandinista guerrillas confronted Somoza’s brutal regime. The personal and economic cost paid by Nicaragua during this period was high, particularly along the country’s Caribbean coast. Sandino’s tactics of targeting mines and kidnapping some owners and their families also disrupted the mining industry. An estimated 1,115 rebels, 75 National Guardsmen, and 136 US Marines were killed in the struggle.

**Nicaraguan National Guardsmen fire from the roof of a downtown Managua building towards the presidential palace in June 1936. They are armed with the older Krag-Jorgensen M1895 rifles instead of the standard Springfield M1903 and Browning machine guns. When he launched his coup in June 1936, their commander Anastasio Somoza could rely on their loyalty. This loyalty was guaranteed when the incumbent president, Sacasa, threatened the replace the National Guard with a new police force. This was not the smartest thing for the president to announce in the circumstances and it basically sealed his fate. (Photo by Keystone-France/Gamma-Keystone via Getty Images)**

**A Guatemalan troop train has halted on the line to provide a mobile fortress to resist the advance of revolutionary forces in 1929. Mounted at the front of the train is a 75mm mountain gun and there is a light gun dismounted at the side. The smaller gun is a Hotchkiss 42mm M1875, which was used by the US Army for many years before being sold to countries like Guatemala. A lack of artillery in Central American armies in the 1920s means that this train is a formidable weapon against poorly armed rebels. (Cody Images)**

## Venezuela’s Doomed Rebellions 1929

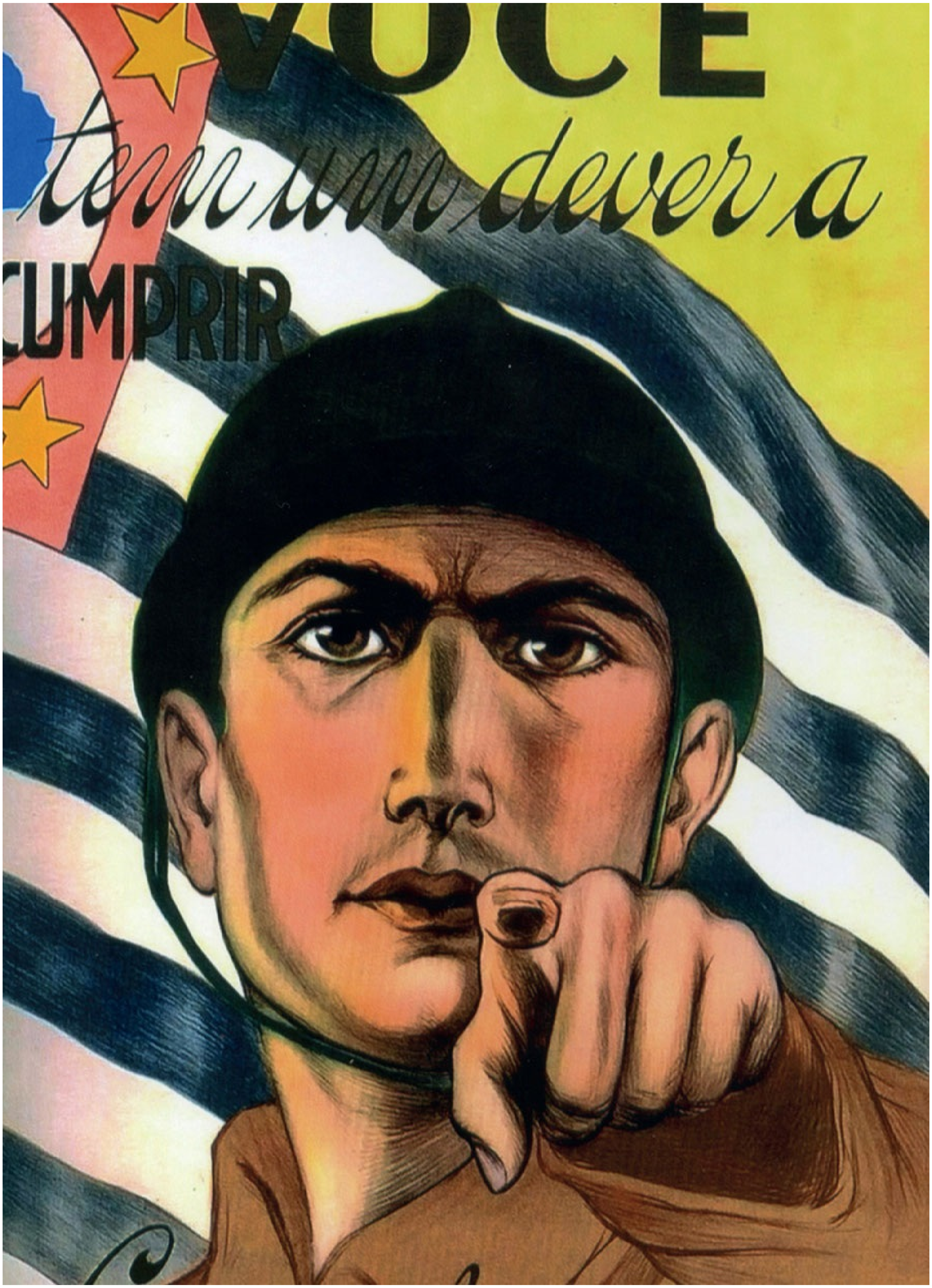
By 1929, the brutal dictator of Venezuela, General Vincente Gomez, had ruled the country since 1908, retaining power by terrorizing the long-suffering population. Few Venezuelans were willing to risk their lives, or those of their families, to challenge his stranglehold on power. During 1929, however, Gomez faced a number of uncoordinated rebellions, all of which were to fail dismally. In February, a rebellion broke out in Central Venezuela, led by one man who had been willing to fight Gomez on several occasions. Emilio Arevalo Cedeno had tried to invade Venezuela five times before but this latest attempt failed like all the others. This abortive rebellion was followed, in May, by a rebellion, launched in central Venezuela by General Jose Rafael Gabaldon. With the support of two other generals, Norberto Borges and Ramon Dorta, but few followers, the rebellion was soon crushed by the pro-Gomez forces and the three generals sent to the dreaded Rotunda prison to meet a grisly fate. Two more rebel leaders attempted to overthrow Gomez in June, this time under the Communist banner. They were Rafael Simon Urbina and Gustavo Machado, who had formed the Venezuelan Revolutionary Party, or PRV, in 1926 and had begun to plan for a revolutionary war. Urbina had been implicated in a plot to overthrow Gomez in 1919 and had spent four years fighting a guerrilla war in his native state of Falcon. He then spent several years in exile in Cuba and Colombia from 1923, before returning to Venezuela in 1925 under a general amnesty. He refused to give up his anti-Gomez conspiracies, and again took part in an ill-fated attempt to depose the dictator in 1928. He escaped punishment once more and began planning for his most serious attempt yet to defeat Gomez. In the spring of 1929, the PRV organized an invasion, using the nearby Dutch colony of Curacao as a base. The leader of the Communist invasion force, Gustavo Machado, decided to raid the administrative center of Curacao, Port Amsterdam, and take the Dutch governor there hostage. His small raiding party also overcame the Dutch troops guarding the garrison's armory, killing three soldiers and capturing a number of rifles. Machado and his men then joined the 250 men of self-styled "General" Rafael Simon Urbina's army. Machado and Urbina planned to invade Venezuela from Curacao with a force of 300 Venezuelans and an additional 90 volunteers from the Dominican Republic. The latter had been working as contract workers in the Dutch colony and had been recruited to the rebel cause by Communist agitators. The advance party of PRV volunteers landed in Falcon State from a steamer called the Maracaibo. Local Venezuelan troops, under the command of General Leon Jurado, were soon joined by several light bombers of Gomez's air force, which bombed the demoralized Communist troops into retreat. The poorly organized revolution failed before it had really begun, and the outnumbered rebels escaped into the jungle. Luckily for the rebel leaders, none of them ended up in Gomez's dreaded dungeons, where he was known to personally torture rebels. Gomez was nothing if not resilient, and dealt with the various rebellions of 1929 with little apparent difficulty. He survived another six years, and was not overthrown by his opponents, dying from natural causes at the age of 78.



**General Juan Vicente Gomez was one of the longest-standing and bloodiest dictators in Latin American history, ruling Venezuela from 1908 until 1935. He was as bloodthirsty as they come and enjoyed personally torturing political and other prisoners. Some prisoners were executed in unspeakable ways for his entertainment after being drawn by lots. During his rule the oil industry was established in Venezuela, and Gomez salted away at least $200 million of its profits in his bank account. His death by natural causes in 1935 was a great relief for the Venezuelan people but after 27 years of despotic rule it took a while for the people to adjust to any form of political freedom. (Cody Images)**

**Venezuelan cavalry are seen on maneuvers in 1936, a year after the death of the dictator General Gomez. They are armed with newly arrived Belgian Mauser carbines, part of the large arms shipments which came from that country in the 1930s. General Gomez’s authoritarian regime was followed by a series of well-meaning but not very effective presidents, who never bothered to call proper elections until 1941. During the dictator’s long rule, the Venezuelan Army, Navy and Air Force had been modernized, with the help of a French military mission until 1923. Later missions from Belgium in the 1930s helped establish an army of about 8,000 men, and, as well as imported weaponry, several armored cars were built by local industry. (Cody Images)**

# REVOLUTIONS IN BRAZIL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**A Paulista recruiting poster from 1932 for the state militia, the MMDC, asks the people of Sao Paulo State to look to their consciences. This and several other posters produced by the rebels asked for volunteers to join the ranks of the Constitutionalist Army. It was not the shortage of volunteers that was the problem, but the shortage of rifles with which to arm them. (Author's Collection)**

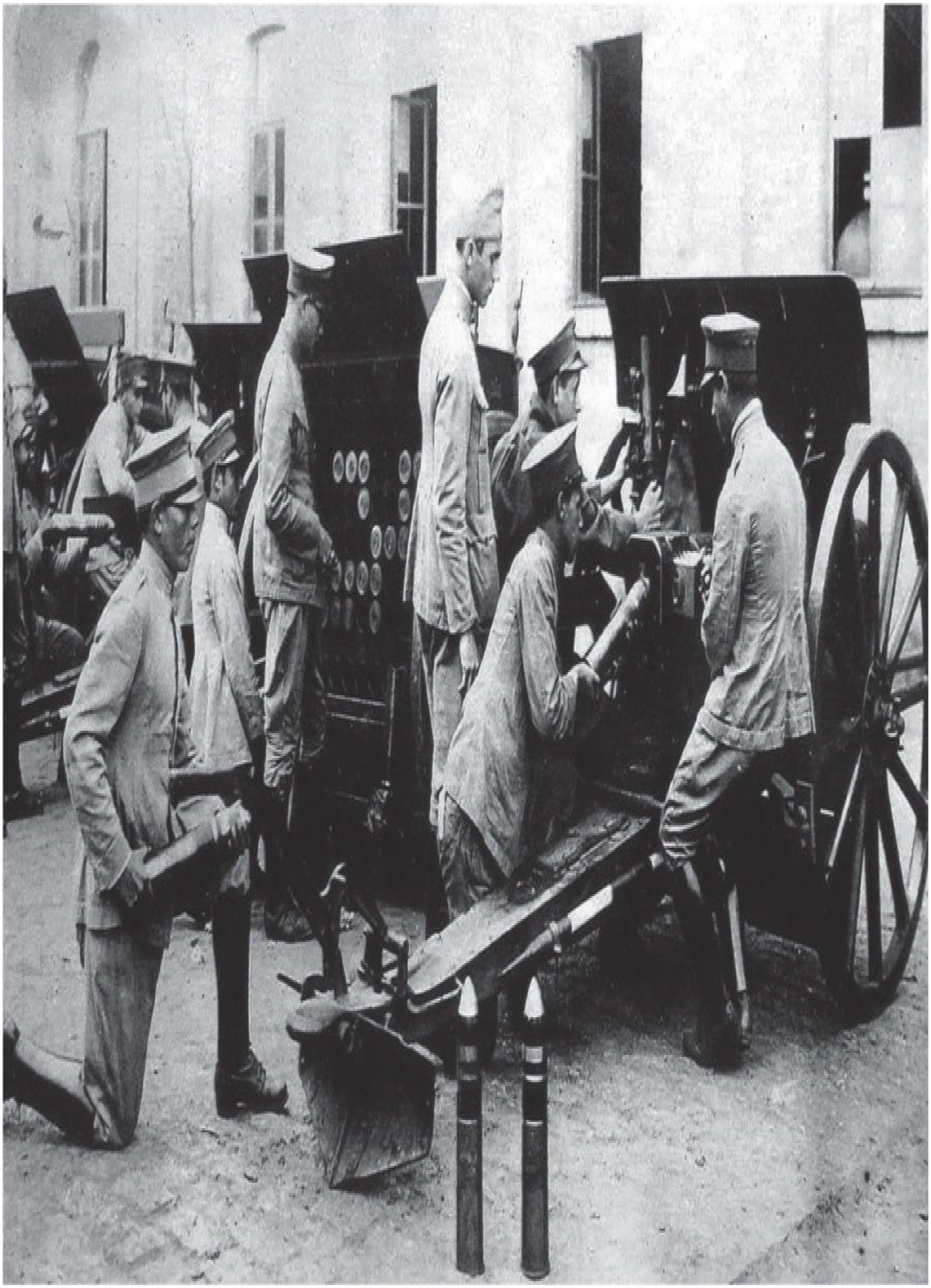
Brazil had been one of the foremost countries of Latin America since the early 19th century. Following the overthrow of the monarchy in 1889, it had enjoyed long periods of relative peace and its people and economy had prospered. During the 1920s and 1930s, however, Brazil was to experience an unprecedented level of conflict, with a series of rebellions, revolutions, and other civil disturbances. Struggles for dominance between the more powerful states of Brazil were to see large parts of the vast country affected by war and its aftermath. From the mid-1930s, Brazil would enter another period of relative stability, but at the cost of a one-party state. This corporate state was to bring Brazil peace, but at the cost of real democracy, and the Brazilian people would wait a long time for its return.

## The "Tenentes Revolt" 1922

The Brazilian Army faced a crisis in the aftermath of World War I. It had lost the trust of the Brazilian people and much of its prestige. Brazilian citizens no longer saw service in the army as desirable, nor did they trust the army to defend them or to stay out of Brazilian politics. There was also a worrying crisis within its officer ranks and in particular amongst the junior officers. Because of the glut of junior officers in the army, promotion into the higher ranks was slow. In 1920 an unmanageable 65 percent of officers were second lieutenants or lieutenants, "tenentes" who might have to wait ten years or more for promotion. Increased conscription into the army to make up for the lack of volunteers also led to a lack of respect for junior officers from the lower ranks. Brazil's economy was also going through a slump in the early 1920s, with the drop in coffee prices affecting civilians and poorer officers. Junior officers, stuck on low salaries with no respect from the civilian population or their own men, became increasingly disgruntled. Many officers now became involved in politics, with some joining the Military Club, which championed politicians seen as friendly to the army.

The Military Club was headed by a former president, Marshal Hermes Rodrigues de Fonseca. Its members supported the candidacy of Nilo Procopio Pecanha for the presidential elections, held in March 1922. The incumbent president’s choice of Artur da Silva Bernardes duly won the election, and, at this point, Fonseca demanded a recount, making veiled threats about the support of his Military Club and its officer members for Pecanha. Denying any electoral irregularities, and upset with further interference by Fonseca, the incumbent president, Epitacio Pessoa*, placed him under a 24-hour house arrest and closed the Military Club for a period of six months. On July 5, a number of defiant young officers from the club took control of Igrejinha Fort at Copacabana, which overlooked the harbor of the Brazilian capital Rio de Janeiro. The fort, with its powerful guns, dominated the harbor, and its occupation by 301 rebellious officers could not be tolerated. Most of the rebellious officers were idealistic young men from the lower middle class. They called for a number of reforms, including the nationalization of the mines and agrarian reform. Isolated in their hilltop fort, the rebels were ignored by the people they hoped to liberate, and they awaited the government response. This came in the form of an air raid by two light bombers and the bombardment of the fort’s defenses by the battleship Minas Gerais.

During the night of July 5–6, most of the officers slipped away, realizing there was no support for their revolt. By the morning only a hard core of 29 officers remained, now prepared to give their lives for their cause. They left the fort, walked down to the waterfront and began to march into the center of Rio de Janeiro. Waiting for them along the beach were up to 3,000 loyal troops, ordered to halt their march when the officers reached them. By the time the officers were within range of the Loyalist soldiers, fear or self-preservation had reduced their number to 18. In a courageous but suicidal act, these last few raised their rifles, and a ridiculously one-sided firefight began. Within minutes, 16 of the young officers were dead and the two survivors were being led away into military custody.



**The crew of a 75mm Krupp field gun of the Brazilian Federal Army undergo drill in the yard of their barracks in 1922. At the time, the first revolt of the lieutenants or “tenentes” was underway in Rio de Janeiro, but did not affect the rest of Brazil. Several revolts by the disgruntled and politicized junior officers of the Brazilian Army took place first in 1922 and then again in 1924, followed by the march of the Prestes Column from 1924 until 1927. (Cody Images)**

## The 1923 Revolution

In 1923, a revolution took place in the southern Brazilian state of Rio Grande do Sul, in what was to prove an extremely costly political squabble. Rio Grande do Sul was a sparsely populated state, whose northern half made up of the wide-open plains of the Brazilian pampas. Traditional Gaucho cowboys had tended cattle on these plains for several hundred years and had proved themselves skillful irregular cavalry in times of war. Having fought in a number of 19th-century revolutions, the Gauchos were now to be at the center of Brazil’s next political crisis. This was sparked by the controversial re-election of long-time state Governor Borges de Medeiros. He had held power in the state for ten years, having been first elected as governor in 1898 and holding the office until 1908. Having left office, Medeiros effectively continued to govern through his chosen successor, Carlos Barbosa. He then chose to stand for governor again in 1923. He was duly elected with 75 percent of the vote and his opponent, landowner and diplomat Joaquim Francisco de Assis, was furious, accusing Medeiros of electoral fraud. To make matters worse, Medeiros felt that the economy of the state should work for the benefit of all and he sought to reduce the dominance of the powerful cattle ranchers within the state. He announced a series of policies that would effectively ruin many cattle businesses almost overnight. These policies added to the woes of the cattle farmers, who had already been hit by the drop in international meat prices. Assis and his supporters knew that Medeiros would not relinquish power in the state voluntarily, and they began plans for a rebellion. The rebel leaders already had a ready-made Gaucho cavalry force at their disposal. It was expected that the conflict would begin in Rio Grande do Sul, but that they would quickly attract other “rebel” states to their side. It was hoped these richer states would then supply the rebels with the arms and ammunition that they were desperately short of. In the meantime, they would have to make do with the weapons at their disposal and cause as much chaos as possible. January 25, 1923, the day of Borges de Medeiros’ inauguration as governor, was the date set. From the outset, it soon became clear that Medeiros was in no mood to back down to the rebel threats, and it was equally obvious that the governor was willing to take the rebels on alone with the limited forces available to him.

The 12,000 men of the Rio Grande do Sul State forces consisted mainly of five irregular provisional brigades, each with responsibility for controlling one of five military regions. They were divided into North, North-East, South, South Central, and Western Frontier brigades and, like the rebel forces, were essentially the private armies of their commanders. Many of the state commanders had long-standing personal grudges against their rivals, and this meant that the war was often bitterly contested. Medeiros had, for some time, been making careful preparations for his expected showdown with the rebels. He knew he needed more armaments and entrusted one of his commanders, General Flores de Cunha, with purchasing arms for his forces in Argentina. With the Argentinian Mauser rifles and ammunition he was able to buy, Medeiros was able to expand his forces. His army was a mixture of a few regular soldiers, irregular volunteers, and state troops. He also employed a number of Uruguayan Gaucho “mercenary” cavalry under the command of Nepomucena Saraiva. These tough fighters were to prove vital during the guerrilla war fought by both sides during 1923. Along with Mauser rifles, Medeiros’ shipment from Argentina included a few heavy machine guns.

**Facing the state forces was a rebel army estimated at 6,000 men, divided into a number of mobile columns of Gaucho cavalry. The hope was that by breaking the army up into smaller units, they could cause as much disruption to the state government as possible. These mobile columns were to fight independently under their individual commanders for most of the revolution. All of the rebel commanders were larger-than-life characters, but General Honorio Lemes, "The Lion of Cavera," was the most famous. He was a local landowner, who hesitated to join the revolution at first, but in early February brought his 300 men into the rebel army. Lemes had armed this force at his own expense and most of his men had been issued with Winchesters and Mausers. Other rebel commanders of note included Jose Antonio Matos Neto, Leonel da Rocha, and Felipe Portinho, who had similarly been forced to arm their followers. Besides the commanders' own small personal retinues, the rebel army was made up of "ranchers, students and the unemployed." They had to be armed with whatever rifles or revolvers were available, but many made do with hardwood lances. The rebels sought support from the two friendly states of Sao Paulo and Minas Gernais. Representatives from the rebels did manage to meet with officials from both states, but were told that neither would support their abortive "revolution." This meant that unless they could attract the attention of the central government, the fighting would remain confined to Rio du Sol and could be ignored by the rest of Brazil. Although the rebel army was primarily a mobile force of cavalry, they did hold some towns, in which attempts were made to create a logistics network with workshops to repair precious firearms. Some women also formed a "Liberators Red Cross" organization to tend for any wounded who managed to make it back alive from the pampas.**

## The Fighting

Fighting began almost immediately, in late January and early February 1923, with rival cavalry forces raiding each other’s territory, especially in the northwest of the state. These early raids were driven by a need to capture weapons. Although the state forces were relatively well armed, with some artillery and a number of machine guns, they were always in need of more. Rebel commanders like General Jose Antonio Netto and Honorio Lemes now proved that they were natural guerrilla cavalry leaders. Whenever possible they avoided open battles with the state forces, employing irregular “hit and run” tactics against their less mobile but better-armed foes. From the very beginning, the rebels’ main aim was to force Medeiros to call for military aid from the Federal Government. This, they hoped, would push other Brazilian states to come out in their support and turn their rebellion into a nationwide conflict. Throughout the spring and summer of 1923, there were a number of clashes. Rebels under Felipe Portinho skirmished with state forces under Firmino Paim Filho. On the western border of the state, there were running battles between Honorio Lemes’ forces and those of Jose Antonio Flores. In an attempt to counter the mobile columns of the rebels, the state’s West Brigade, under General Flores de Cunha, formed a motorized column. This was tasked with helping the state cavalry to locate the largest rebel force under Honorio Lemes. State forces made full use of the limited state transport system, using the region’s railways to move troops from battle to battle. The main railway line ran from east to west across the center of the state, with another line running northwards from its center into Santa Catarina State. These two railways gave the state forces an advantage in controlling the northern half of Rio Grande do Sul. Little has been written about the details of the fighting in 1923, although press reports mention a number of skirmishes, usually involving hundreds rather than thousands of troops. Individual state and rebel commanders fought their own personal wars within the main conflict, attacking each other’s outposts, encampments, and fortified towns and villages. The previous civil conflict, fought in the late 1800s, had seen widespread atrocities by both sides, with captured troops usually having their throats slit. Although there were some reprisals, they were not on the scale of those in the 1890s, and prisoners were taken.

Pelotas

**The famed Gaucho cavalry of General Zeco Netto ride into the city of Pelotas on October 29, 1923. These South American “cowboys” were poorly armed, although none of the riders in this photograph are armed with the traditional lance used by some. Netto’s men took the city in an effort to force the intervention of the Federal authorities in far-off Rio de Janeiro. Their occupation of Pelotas was short lived, and they were forced out a few hours later by state troops, while the Federal authorities took little or no notice of their actions. (Cody Images)**

## The End

By the autumn of 1923, the rebels were exhausted and their always poor supplies of arms and ammunition were now critically low. In a final gamble to force the intervention of the Federal Army, rebel commander General Zeco Netto took his troops into the city of Pelotas. Pelotas was the only city of any significance in the interior of Rio Grande do Sul and its capture was bound to make headlines in far off Rio de Janeiro. They attacked the few state defenders at dawn on October 29 in a surprise attack and forced them to flee for their lives. Netto’s cavalry entered the city a few hours later, but even as they were parading through its center on horseback, state reinforcements were being rushed to the city. A mere six hours after they had entered Pelotas, Netto’s men were riding out again with a substantial state force chasing them. Although the rebels had never envisaged holding the city for long, their stunt failed to draw the hoped-for response from the Federal Government. The two parties were now totally exhausted, after ten months of fighting almost constantly in the saddle. The rebels knew that in reality they could no longer hope to defeat the state forces militarily. Equally, Borges de Medeiros knew that the state forces would struggle to crush the rebels without the “unwanted” Federal assistance. A provisional peace treaty was reached by the warring factions on November 7, 1923, with the assistance of the Brazilian minister of war. This agreement was ratified as the Peace of Pedras Altas on December 14.

# The 1924 Rebellion

The 1924 rebellion broke out on July 5, the second anniversary of the 1922 rebellion. This rebellion, like the 1922 one, was led largely by army lieutenants, “tenentes,” who were dissatisfied with the continued dominance of Brazil’s “coffee elite” and the lack of change in the political situation since 1922. The revolt was supposed to begin simultaneously in the states of Sao Paulo, Parana, Rio Grande do Sul, Santa Catarina, Minas Gerais, and Mato Grosso, but, due to poor communication and organization, it only started in Sao Paulo State. Initially, the Sao Paulo rebels were quite successful, as they received support from the Forca Publica state militia and many junior officers. Some areas of the large city remained in the hands of troops loyal to the government, and sporadic street fighting went on throughout the rebellion. On July 9, the Loyalist state governor and his troops withdrew from the city, moving to join Federal forces gathering around Sao Paulo. Rebel troops now entered the main banks in the city and “withdrew” 1,800,000 in local currency to finance their campaign. The leader of the rebellion was a retired colonel, Isidoro Dias Lopes, who nominated the commander of the Forca Publica, Major Miguel da Costa, as his second in command. Before long the rebels had gathered 3,500 troops and had begun to arm civilian volunteers. Although many Brazilians were reluctant to join the revolution, 300 Hungarian, Italian, and German migrant workers did agree to fight. They had arrived in Brazil with the promise of well-paid work but were disappointed with the jobs on offer, and many were looking for adventure. Rebel recruiters offered the desperate migrants free land if they would fight for the revolution, and most had little to lose. They were nearly all veterans of World War I and knew how to handle the rifles they were issued from the captured state armory. These foreign volunteers were then formed into three companies along nationalist lines and issued with any spare uniforms that could be found. Lopes did receive support from local anarchists and communists, but turned down their suggestion of forming “Workers Battalions.” One of the rebel leader’s first orders was to confiscate any aircraft, military or civilian, at airfields around the city. Two military pilots were found to fly the handful of rebel planes and another four civilian pilots were hired to fly the commercial aircraft. They were soon faced with attacks by a small squadron of government aircraft, made up of six Breguet 14 light bombers and two Nieuport 21s. A four-plane air raid on Sao Paulo on July 10 caused heavy casualties in the busy city, with 250 dead and 200 injured. Although one of the Federal planes was shot down, the population panicked and those who could began to flee the city. Air raids were to continue for the next few weeks and were followed by artillery bombardments by the Federal Army. Federal forces around the city had been growing, and by mid-July, there were some 30,000 troops laying siege to Sao Paulo. Their 100 medium and heavy artillery pieces were well dug in and firing a large number of shells into the city center. The rebels had a number of heavy guns themselves, and both sides settled down to a daily exchange of shells from their trenches. Few military casualties were suffered on either side and it was the civilian population that bore the brunt of this fighting. By the 18th, a reported 2,000 people had been killed by the bombardment and the city's cemeteries were said to be full. In the next week another 1,000 died, as neither side in the conflict spared much thought for the plight of the people. The rebel air arm now launched its only air attack against the Federal forces, with a raid on the battleship Minas Gerais sailing just off the coast. No details of the raid's effect exist but it is doubtful if the battleship suffered any significant damage from the grenades thrown from the back of a light plane. Meanwhile, the rebel leadership was considering how to respond to the gathering Federal armies. Apart from a rebellion in Rio Grande do Sul, no other "rebel" states supported the Sao Paulo rebels. They held Sao Paulo for three weeks awaiting developments elsewhere in Brazil but nothing happened. Instead, large numbers of Federal troops were reported to be approaching the city, including irregulars and so-called "Patriotic Battalions." On July 26, a Federal aircraft flew low over Sao Paulo, dropping leaflets warning all civilians to leave the city before a final assault began. An estimated 250,000 people took the warning and left Sao Paulo to take shelter in its safer outer suburbs. Much of the city center had been damaged by shelling and several large fires had destroyed many buildings. In a final conference, Colonel Lopes and Major Costa agreed that the decision had to be made whether to stay and fight to the death or to get out of the city immediately. A number of their men had begun to desert their posts and only a small proportion of the 20,000 garrison could be trusted to fight. Their departure from Sao Paulo was better organized than their arrival in the city and had been kept top secret. Throughout the siege, the rebel commander had kept a corridor along the railway open with some of his troops, and this was now to be their escape route. On the night of July 27, 3,000 of the more determined rebel troops quietly left the city on 13 commandeered trains. The Federal troops supposedly laying siege to Sao Paulo didn't even notice them leaving and appear to have slept through the entire evacuation. The rebels moved westwards into the state of Mato Grosso, and eventually to the remote region bordering Paraguay and Argentina. The rebels could not agree on whether to remain in their temporary base and some marched to unite with forces from Rio Grande do Sul.

**Brazilian Federal troops loyal to the government are bivouacking in the center of the city of Sao Paulo after taking it over from the rebels in September 1924. The rebels in Sao Paulo had expected support from several other Brazilian states but most of this support did not materialize. Many of the officers involved in the revolt in the city had gone to join the other rebel groups that had decided to continue the struggle out in the jungles of Brazil. (Cody Images)**

In Sao Paulo, Federal troops and tanks entered the undefended city and “occupied” it, as if it was an enemy capital. Although the Brazilian Government thought they had silenced the rebels for good, several twists and turns to the rebellion remained.

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PHARMA

**Renault FT-17 light tanks of the Federal Army advance into Sao Paulo in the wake of the defeat of the rebels in 1924. The Brazilian Army had an armored company, which had been established in 1921 with worn-out light tanks supplied by the French. They were supplied with two types of armament, either a machine gun or 37mm gun. Most armored vehicles used in the conflicts of Brazil in the 1920s and 1930s were made locally by the various factions. (Cody Images)**

On November 4, another rebellion occurred in the harbor of Rio de Janeiro, when a group of eight lieutenants boarded the Brazilian Navy dreadnought Sao Paulo. They were joined by a number of sailors and civilian volunteers, who helped the ship leave its moorings. It circled the harbor and, “menacingly,” the battleship Minas Gerais. Any hopes that their actions would trigger a general naval mutiny were soon scotched, and the dreadnought began to move out of the harbor. As they left, the rebels fired one shot from a 6-pdr deck gun at the Minas Gerais, wounding one of its crew. Before the crew of the loyal ships could react, the rebel ship was out of the harbor and firing at the guns in the forts at the entrance. Once out at sea, the rebels realized that their mutiny had failed miserably and looked to save their own skins. With many on board the Sao Paulo unhappy with the rebels, it was decided to sail to Montevideo, the Uruguayan capital, and seek asylum there.

## The Prestes Column, 1924–27

Luis Carlos Prestes was captain of a railway engineering battalion in the remote southern state of Rio Grande do Sul when the 1924 revolt broke out. Prestes had been sympathetic to the 1922 rebels but had been ill when the rebellion broke out. Now recovered and posted to a remote command, he sought to support the Tenentes Revolt and gathered his loyal troops along with some local Gaucho horsemen. His small force then engaged local Federal Army units and gathered more support, reaching a strength of 2,000 men. Fighting between Prestes’ rebels and the Federal Army continued for a few months, but it was obvious that defeat was inevitable if they stayed where they were. In January 1925, Prestes decided to move his outnumbered force northwards to try and link up with the rebels in Sao Paulo State. Pursued by the Federal Army as it moved through Rio Grande do Sul, his small rebel force was surrounded at Palmeira on January 30. Prestes and some of his men somehow broke through the encirclement and continued their march through the states of Santa Catarina and Parana. The rebel column, under Colonel Lopes, with which Prestes was hoping to link up, had problems of its own. It was defeated by a strong Federal force in late March and, although the survivors of the attack marched on, Colonel Lopes had had enough and passed command to a Major Costa. The Costa column and Prestes linked up in April and now had a combined force of 1,500 men. Eight hundred were the survivors of Prestes' original force and the other 700 were from Costa's column. They renamed themselves the 1st Revolutionary Division and were joined by some smaller groups of rebels, including an artillery battery with three 75mm field guns. The rebels also had four 7mm machine guns and a similar number of automatic rifles, but only 20,000 rounds of ammunition. Although officially a division, the rebels continued to be known as the Prestes Column throughout their existence. Costa was officially in command, but Prestes became field commander and de-facto leader of the rebels. The field guns were quickly abandoned, much to the dismay of the artillerymen who had brought them into the rebel camp, but, if the men were to survive, the column had to be highly mobile, and all of its fighters were mounted. The number of horses needed to keep the column in the field was astonishing, with a reported 100,000 mounts used between 1925 and 1927. The fact that most of these horses were requisitioned from the local populace had an effect on the column's popularity. Although the rebels gained some local support, they knew that they could not challenge the Brazilian Federal Army or threaten the government directly. What they could do was stay in the field, engaging the army whenever it was advantageous to do so and keeping the spirit of rebellion alive for as long as possible. Perhaps their exploits would encourage others still opposed to the Federal Government to rebel again when the time was right. In May 1925, the combined column fought the first of its many engagements with the Federales, suffering a number of casualties. Over the next few years, Prestes and his men roamed the states of north and north-east Brazil, trying, without success, to form alliances with other anti-Federal forces. In fact, they faced a great deal of opposition from the local population, who did not want to suffer the wrath of the Federal Army and their irregulars. These irregular government forces included units of former bandits, formed into so-called "Patriotic Battalions." These ex-bandits were happy to exchange their worn-out Winchesters for modern Mausers and receive regular pay. They were also given uniforms and equipment, before being sent into the jungle to fight the rebels. In most cases the Patriotic Battalions were of little value, with most of their men deserting and taking their prized Mausers with them. Although the Prestes Column often managed to defeat the various forces sent against them, their morale suffered after over two years on the march. Some of the column's most fervent opponents were the private army of local warlord Horacio Mattos. His army, made up of local horsemen who were the equals of the rebels, fought them in several skirmishes in April 1926. Apart from constant military and bandit opposition, the Prestes Column also faced increasing hunger and disease, with malaria being a particular problem. By late 1926, the column's strength had been reduced to 800 men, but only 600 of these were fit to fight and there was a desperate shortage of ammunition. Over the course of its epic march, the composition of the column had changed dramatically. The number of regular troops fell by half, with many of the original men lost in action, wounded, or fallen ill and left behind by the ever-moving column. Raw volunteers, who had to be trained "on the march," eventually made up 50 percent of the column's strength. During its two-and-a-half-year odyssey, the column covered over 15,500 miles, through 13 Brazilian states, travelling through jungles, mountains, and some of Brazil's most inhospitable country. It fought 56 battles and skirmishes against the Federal Army, irregulars, private armies, and bandit groups. By late 1926, the rebels were exhausted, and the main column of 620 men, under the command of Prestes, crossed the border into Bolivia. A small, diehard unit of 65 men continued the fight for a few more months but by this stage had only 20 working Mauser rifles between them. These last remnants of the Prestes Column crossed the Bolivian border in March 1927, ending an epic campaign characterized by extraordinary endurance and indomitable spirit.

**A Brazilian Federal Army Hotchkiss M1914 machine gun position is ready to attack the soldiers of the Prestes Column in the summer of 1925. Although many regular units were fighting the column, there were also thousands of militia and local volunteers involved. By this stage in their epic march across large tracts of Brazil, the Prestes Column was down to about 800 effectives. (Cody Images)**

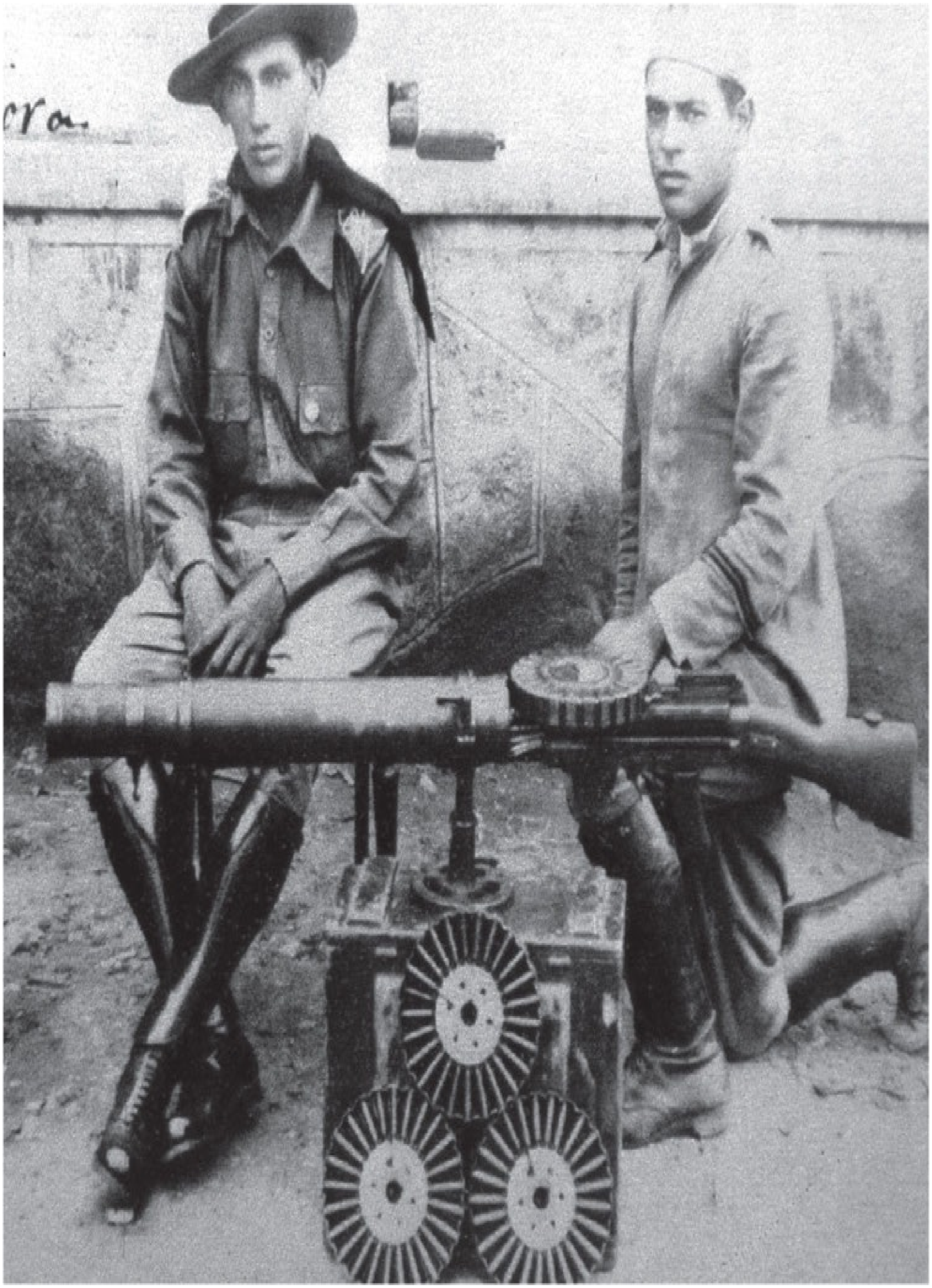
**These proud civilian defenders of a town attacked by the band of the bandit leader “Lampiao” in 1927 pose with their Mauser and Winchester repeating rifles. The poor people of Brazil were often very conservative by nature, and many did not support the various revolutions and rebellions of the 1920s and 1930s. During the progress of the Prestes Column in northern Brazil between 1924 and 1927, many of these people joined Patriotic Battalions and fought the rebels. They were often issued with modern Mauser rifles by way of payment for fighting the rebels, and would, like these men, be proud to show them off. (Cody Images)**

## The 1930 “Bourgeois” Revolution

In March 1930, a general election took place in Brazil when the outgoing president, Washington Luis Pereira de Souza, reached the end of his term of office. Brazilian politics were dominated by the politicians of two Brazilian states, Sao Paulo and Minas Gerais. Souza was from Sao Paulo, and the general protocol was that the next president should come from Minas Gerais. However, the president nominated another Sao Paulo politician, Julio Prestes, which virtually guaranteed his success in the election.

This threw the politicians of Minas Gerais and other Brazilian states into uproar, and they swiftly formed a political alliance to support the presidential candidacy of Getulio Vargas, governor of Rio Grande do Sul. Vargas was seen as a compromise candidate, as he did not come from either of the two dominant states. Julio Prestes was elected, nevertheless, in a victory mired in allegations of electoral fraud. Supporters of Vargas now looked to military means to get him to the presidency. A loose coalition of politicians, landed gentry, and military officers formed behind Vargas, including former rebels from the 1922 and 1924 tenente rebellions. For the next few months the rebels plotted and schemed as arms began disappearing from armories across Brazil. The military leader of the planned rebellion was Lieutenant-Colonel Pedro Monteiro, who had fought the Prestes Column in 1927 and formed a bond with Vargas while serving in Rio

Grande do Sul. Monteiro now assembled a secret force of police and the private armies of local pro-Vargas ranchers. Military officers were initially recruited selectively, as their loyalty was often suspect. The rebels were confident that the rank and file would join the revolution once it was in motion. Support for the impending revolution was strongest in the states of Minas Gerais and Paraiba, and in Vargas’ home state of Rio Grande do Sul. Weapons for the rising were being manufactured in local arms factories in Minas Gerais: one factory was producing Mills bomb hand grenades, while another was making 75mm field guns.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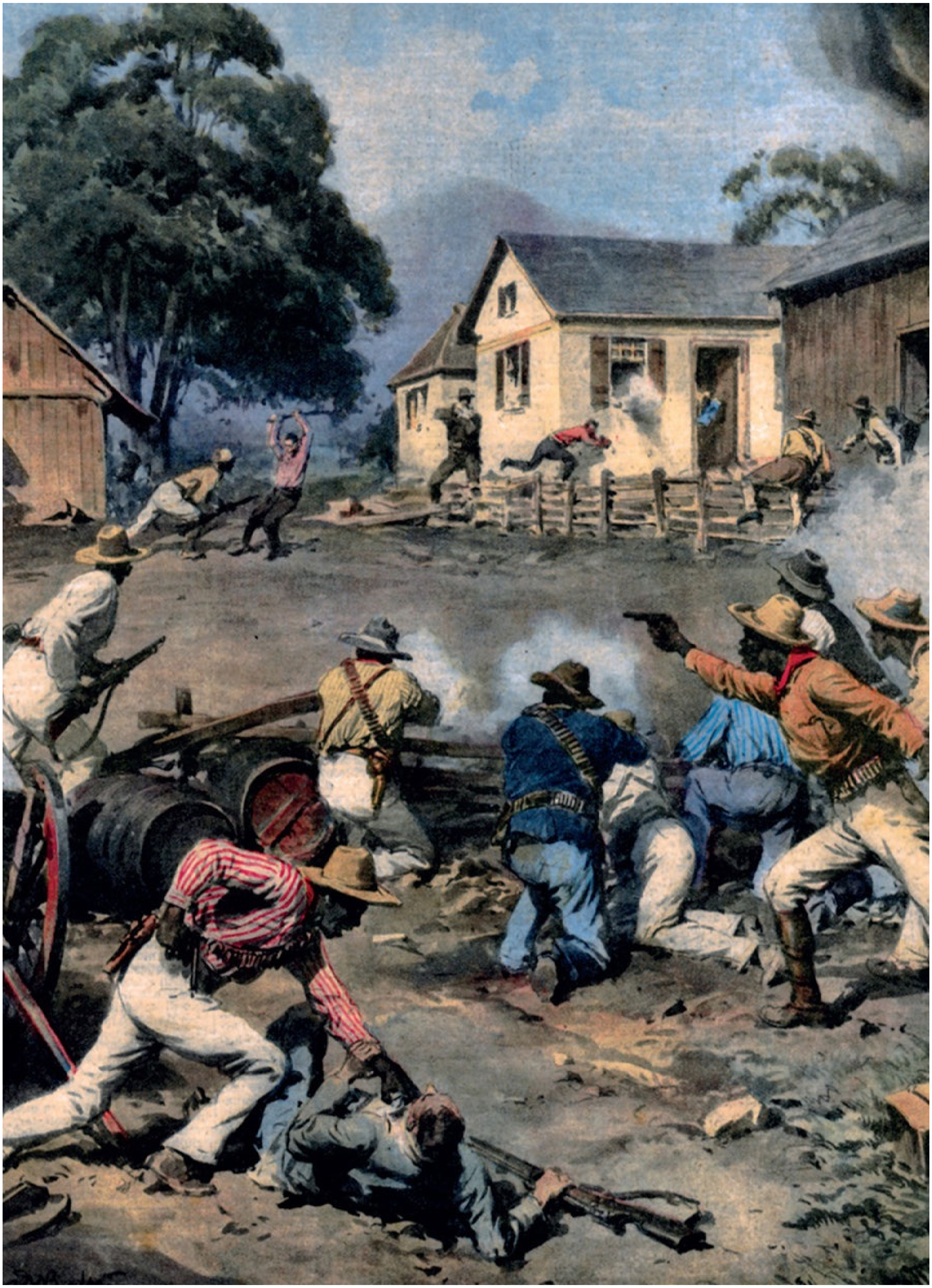
**Two Brazilian soldiers loyal to the Federal Government pose with a Lewis light machine gun captured from the supporters of Getulio Vargas in July 1930. The Lewis was not a standard machine gun of the Brazilian Army and may well have been imported by the rebels at the start of the revolution. (Cody Images)**

## The Military Campaign

The revolution began on October 3, and within 48 hours the rebels were in control of the state of Rio Grande do Sul. Most Federal garrisons in the state gave up to the rebels without a fight, with many joining the revolution. On the 5th, soldiers in the neighboring state of Santa Catarina had joined the rebels, followed on the 6th by troops in Parana State. With the units from Parana, the rebels now could count on the support of some 20,000–30,000 troops. The rebels now sought the support of other veterans of the 1922–24 revolutions, but were turned down by many who did not believe in the rebels' revolutionary pedigree. Luis Prestes was particularly scathing of the rebels, saying that this revolution was not genuine and merely a "bourgeois revolt." As more states joined the revolution, their forces began advancing from north and south towards the capital, Rio de Janeiro. Like the rest of Brazilian society, the Federal Army was deeply divided by Vargas' revolt. Some 80,000 troops supported Vargas, while 100,000 were prepared to defend the "legitimate" government of Brazil. As the rebels closed on the capital, a strong Federal Army blocked their path in northern Parana State.

## The Battle of Itarare

The rebel army had advanced northwards, through Santa Catarina State and into Parana State, but their progress was halted at the town of Itarare in northern Parana in early October. Here, waiting for them, was a Federal force ordered to dig in and halt the rebel advance at all costs. Itarare was an important rail town on the main south–north railway running towards Rio de Janeiro. It was 428 miles south-west of the capital, and the embattled Loyalist Federal Army dug in around the town, preparing fortifications protected by barbed wire right across the front line between the two armies. The Federales then brought up more machine guns and artillery and waited for the 7,800 rebels to attack. The defenders were heavily outnumbered, both in men and artillery, with only four guns to the rebels’ 18, but their positions were well prepared. Of the total Federal garrison of 5,600 men, only 1,600 were regulars, however, the rest being Forca Publica and civilian volunteers. Bad weather hampered the defenders’ preparations, but also made life difficult for the rebel army, which had now lost its momentum. The fighting around the town lasted from October 12 to the 20th, with neither side able to gain the upper hand. Bad weather continued to affect the struggle and favored the well-dug-in defenders, but events elsewhere in Brazil rendered the Federal Army’s position at Itarare untenable.



**This stylized illustration from the cover of an Italian magazine of October 26, 1930 shows an episode from fighting in Brazil during the revolution that year. The caption says that a band of black rebels supporting Sao Paulo State are attacking a ranch. Civil conflict in Brazil in the 1920s and 1930s often resulted in the settling of local grievances under cover of revolutionary actions. (Author's Collection)**

**A Hotchkiss M1914 machine gun crew of the Federal Army are seen preparing to defend the town of Itarare on the border of Sao Paulo and Parana states in October 1930. The Army was deeply divided during the 1930 revolution, with 100,000 supporting the government and 80,000 behind the revolution. When the Federal troops loyal to the government were defeated at Itarare after a five-hour battle, the rebels under Getulio Vargas were able to advance on Rio de Janeiro. (Cody Images)**

**Getulio Vargas, the newly installed president of Brazil, calmly smokes a cigar as his supporters celebrate his assumption of power on November 3, 1930. Vargas, who received most support from the southern Brazilian states, had been the loser in the recent election. His military campaign to take the presidency by force had initially been fought against the odds. But the government army faded away as the fighting progressed, which allowed Vargas to enter Rio de Janeiro in triumph. He turned Brazil into an authoritarian corporate state along the European Fascist model and, with the help of the military, held onto power until 1945. (Cody Images)**

## Vargas' Victory

As the battle for Itarare continued, the state troops of Minas Gerais joined the revolution, opening a second front and preparing to invade neighboring states. Minas Gerais forces invaded the three states of Ispirito Santo, Goias, and Bahia, with all three joining the revolution. At the same time, rebel troops in another two states, Retife and Rio Grande do Norte, marched on their respective state capitals. The main Minas Gerais armies now pressed south, towards the border with Rio de Janeiro State and the national capital. They were halted temporarily by the Federal defenses north of the town of Juiz de Fora but soon pushed on to the capital. Federal garrisons now usually surrendered without a fight, as their troops did not want to fight for the unpopular president. With the war all but won, the rebels now faced a surprising turn of events when, on October 24, military officers in Rio de Janeiro launched a coup d'état against President Prestes. The three-man junta took over the government and began to negotiate with representatives of Vargas over who should now rule Brazil. Discussions ended when the vanguard of the rebel army advanced into the suburbs of the capital on October 27, and the members of the junta lost their nerve, backed down, and accepted Vargas as president. Vargas wisely decided to remain outside the capital until he was certain the situation was calm. He also wanted to wait until his loyal troops from Rio Grande do Sul could escort him into Rio de Janeiro. Over the next three days 3,000 loyal Gaucho cavalry arrived in Rio, and Vargas soon followed, to be handed power by the military junta. In the aftermath of Vargas' triumph, the senior ranks of the Brazilian Army were purged, with many officers being forced into retirement. By the end of 1930, nine of 11 major-generals and 12 of 20 brigadier-generals were retired.

## The 1932 Revolution

Getulio Vargas' victory in October 1930 did not bring the hoped-for peace to Brazil, instead sowing the seeds of further conflict. Vargas chose not to honor the constitution of 1891, as he had promised, but instead formed a provisional government with dictatorial powers. This act dissolved the Federal Government and immediately turned many of his former allies against him. He next replaced the traditional state governors with so-called "interventors," all appointed by him. This blatant grab for power by Vargas infuriated many Brazilians, especially in the crucial and powerful state of Sao Paulo. There the favored candidate for governor was replaced by a Vargas-appointed "interventor" from Pernambuco State. Vargas was forced to give way to pressure from Sao Paulo leaders and his appointee was forced to resign in July 1931. The damage had already been done, however, and Sao Paulo's leaders began looking for allies to help overthrow the Vargas government. In April 1932, Vargas announced an election, to be held in May 1933, but this concession failed to impress the Sao Paulo rebels, or "Paulistas." They approached the military leaders in the states of Minas Gerais, Rio Grande do Sul, and Mato Grosso seeking their support if they rebelled against Vargas. Looking to make the rebellion against Vargas a nationwide campaign, the Paulista leadership offered command of the combined rebel forces to General Klinger from Mato Grosso. He accepted, and planning for a rising no earlier than July 1932 continued. A disagreement between General Klinger, still commander of the Federal troops in Mato Grosso, and the minister of war brought the start of the rebellion forward.

**Brazilian Federal Army machine gunners undergo training before going to the front line to fight the Constitutionalist rebels in 1932. The soldiers are using two types of French Hotchkiss machine gun, the MKI light machine gun and the M1914 medium machine gun. Both types were in service with the Brazilian Army in the 1920s and 1930s, even though the MKI was not a particularly good weapon. In the background of the photograph, other teams wait their turn to use the machine guns under the eye of their instructors stood behind them. (Author's Collection)**

## Rebel Forces Gather

On July 8, 1932, the minister of war dismissed General Klinger from his command in Mato Grosso. This caused great consternation in the rebel ranks, as they realized that once Klinger lost control of his loyal units, he would not be able to regain it. They had to act immediately, and the revolt began in Sao Paulo on July 9. The Paulistas anticipated support, as promised, from other Brazilian states, but when Minas Gerais, Rio Grande do Sul, and Mato Grosso did not declare for the rebellion, they were left facing every other Brazilian state on their own. On July 12, General Klinger arrived in Sao Paulo with a small entourage of officers and a few troops. He had been unable to persuade the 5,000-strong Matto Grosso militia to join him but still offered his services to the Paulistas. His promised 13,000,000 rounds of ammunition also did not materialize, nor, more importantly, did the artillery pieces he had promised. Undeterred, the rebels took control of Sao Paulo State. They did manage to persuade the Federal 2nd Infantry Division and a mixed brigade, stationed in the state, to join the revolution.

## The Opposing Forces

The Constitutionalist Army was the term usually used for the Paulista military forces, as they were fighting for the re-introduction of the 1891 Constitution. It was made up almost entirely of the state militia force of Sao Paulo, called the

“Forca Publica,” totaling some 25,000 men. At its height, the Constitutionalist Army may have grown to as many as 80,000 men, but a shortage of rifles limited its size. The Federal 2nd Infantry Division, which joined the rebels in the first days of the rebellion, formed the backbone of the army, bringing their rifles with them. There was great enthusiasm for the rebel cause in Sao Paulo, with 200,000 volunteers coming forward in the first days of the war. The Paulista leadership certainly had high ambitions at the start of the war, producing 440,000 light khaki uniforms. Any volunteer accepted into the ranks received a week’s basic training before being sent to the front. On arrival he might be expected to defend a trench, sharing a rifle with up to six of his comrades. He might also arrive at the front to find that his junior officers had decided to take the day off. According to reports, some officers would abandon their men at the front for days, taking a very relaxed attitude to war service. As a result, when the fighting began, NCOs, or even older ordinary volunteers, would take charge until they returned. The lack of artillery was also a problem for the Constitutionalists, with only 25 medium field guns available at the start of the war. Shells for the guns were produced in the factories of Sao Paulo, which also produced a number of other improvised weapons during the conflict. The Constitutionalist Army would have to rely on locally made weapons, including six armored trains, named T1 to T6. These were mostly armed with Hotchkiss machine guns, although one did have a 75mm field gun. At least five different types of armored car were produced in the metal and rail workshops of Sao Paulo. Tanks improvised by armor-plating tractors were also built, with two types known to have been produced. Other weapons included a crude flamethrower, one of which was attached to an armored tractor, and mines that were used to defend Sao Paulo ports. The state workshops also produced at least three types of steel helmet. Rifles were the only weapon beyond the capabilities of the Constitutionalists, as they lacked the necessary machinery for tooling them. Sao Paulo factories did, however, produce “cheap and highly efficient explosives” and a large quantity of munitions on a daily basis. The production of rebel factories in Sao Paulo included 250,000 cartridges, 400 75mm shells, and 3,000 hand and rifle grenades per day. They also manufactured around 160 90mm trench mortars, made from the axles of railway cars. These homemade, but effective, mortars could fire a bomb up to a range of almost a mile.

**A truck full of Constitutionalist troops leaves for the front line during the 1932 revolution with at least one boy soldier in their ranks. The enthusiasm shown by the Paulistas in the early days of the revolution was soon tempered by the reality of war. When they got to their trenches, these soldiers would have their bullets rationed to about four or five a day. When the war began, the rebels only had 6,000,000 cartridges for the 35,000 or so rifles in their armories. Another 500 million bullets were supposed to be on their way for the Paulistas but never materialized during the war. (Cody Images)**

The Brazilian Federal troops fighting in defense of the government in 1932 were called “Legalistas” and numbered around 53,000 men. This regular force was joined by almost 30,000 militia who gathered in Rio de Janeiro to support the Vargas government. These had been sent to support Vargas by the state interventors of Espirito Santo, Sergipe, Bahia, and Pernambuco. According to a US observer, these state troops had little enthusiasm for the war and some had been forcibly conscripted. Most militia, and some regulars, had been given only the most basic parade ground training before being sent to the front. A US observer noted, “the limited target practice received by the conscript soldier in Brazil results in nothing more than a waste of ammunition. The recruits do not understand the basic principles, but fire the rifles, and especially the machine guns, merely to make noise.” One militia unit fighting on the Legalista side does appear to have been of a higher standard than the others. This was the Brigada Militar, from President Vargas’ own state of Rio Grande do Sul, also called the “Gaucho Brigade.” It had three cavalry regiments of the famous Gauchos and five infantry battalions. A force of “Provisorios” irregulars, who were as tough as their militia comrades, fought as auxiliary troops in the brigade. The Legalistas’ artillery totaled 150 medium guns, and they also had two large railway guns. Barrels for the railway guns had been removed from the Brazilian battleship Minas Geraes.

## The First Fighting

The rebellion in Sao Paulo began on July 9, with the Forca Publica taking over

Federal Army garrisons in the city. They also moved to secure other towns and cities in Sao Paulo State, which they achieved without fighting by the 10th. As expected, the entire Federal 2nd Infantry Division had come over to the revolution, and the time was now ripe to advance on Rio de Janeiro. Unfortunately, for the first vital week the Constitutionalist forces did not move. Instead they waited forlornly for other Brazilian states to pledge their support. When this support did not materialize, the Constitutionalist Army finally began to advance, but had squandered any initial momentum. The bulk of the Constitutionalist Army was concentrated in the vicinity of Sao Paulo but now began to advance along the Paraibo Valley to the border with the state of Rio de Janeiro Both sides knew that possession of the valley, which ran through most of Sao Paulo State, was vital to the outcome of the war. Once the rebels reached the border, they would have the largely undefended capital city of Rio de Janeiro at their mercy. However, when they reached the border, instead of advancing, they began to dig entrenchments. Without the support of other states, their aim now seemed to be simply to defend their state against the expected government offensive. The Constitutionalists' failure to advance on the Brazilian capital squandered any chance of a swift victory, and time was now their enemy. News that the interventor of the state of Rio Grande do Sul had pledged his support to Vargas was followed by news that the Brazilian Navy had also pledged loyalty to the Vargas regime. These were major blows, and the navy would now impose a blockade on the coast of Sao Paulo, preventing arms and other supplies reaching the main port of Santos. With no access to the world arms markets, the Constitutionalists would have to rely on their own resources, condemning them to certain defeat.

## The Military Campaign

The military campaign now developed into a positional war fought on several fronts, with the Constitutionalists almost always on the defensive. During the next few weeks neither side showed much initiative, with the rebels unable and the Federal Army unwilling to advance. The three war fronts were the Minas Gerais Front in the north, the Coastal Front in the east, and the Southern Front. Constitutionalist entrenchments were constructed on all three fronts, but the lack of troops meant they were often lightly defended. When Legalista troops attacked, they were able to easily outflank the poorly sited rebel fortifications.

Some observers compared the opposing trenches to the Western Front during World War I. Certainly, the commanders of both armies seemed willing to sacrifice their troops needlessly, with little hope of gaining much ground. Although there were a number of engagements during the war, observers said that there was little “hard fighting.” In many cases the Legalista armies were content to slowly envelop the Constitutionalist positions, lay siege to them, and starve them out. The fighting on the Minas Gerais Front did not start until August 2 and was fought on the Federal side by one regular infantry division, the 4th, and a number of state and militia units. In total there were 18,000 Federal regulars and irregulars on the long front, facing a total of 7,000 Constitutionalist troops. Federal forces broke the rebel lines on August 26 and advanced towards Sao Paulo, but were still 43 miles away when the war ended. On the Coastal Front, 34,000 Federal troops faced the strongest rebel army of 20,000 men. The Federal Army advanced 44 miles toward the Constitutionalist capital at Sao Paulo, but their troops were still 93 miles from the city when the war ended. One focus of the fighting on the Coastal Front was the half-mile-long railway tunnel that ran through the Mantiquierra Mountains into Minas Gerais State. It was held from the second day of the revolution at the Minas Gerais border, initially, by a 100-strong detachment of Constitutionalist troops. Fighting for control of the vital tunnel continued throughout the war, with its defenders reinforced during the fighting. By the end of the battle for the tunnel, there were 800 rebel troops defending it with one precious 75mm gun. Although coming under increasing pressure throughout July and August from increasingly large Legalista forces, the defenders managed to hold the tunnel until the end of the war in September. The Southern Front was most lightly defended by the Constitutionalists, as they had expected their allies, not enemies, to come from the states bordering the region. They had only 3,000–5,000 lightly armed Forca Publica troops to face a 18,000 Federal force made up of the 3rd and 5th infantry divisions, three cavalry divisions, and the Gaucho Brigade. In addition, there were irregulars, Provisorios, and militia from the states of Parana and Santa Caterinia. Constitutionalist defenses at Itare, a town astride the north–south railway, were broken by the Federal Army on July 17. Vain attempts by three Constitutionalist planes to disrupt the Federal advance on Itare failed, and the small garrison prepared to defend it. The rebel garrison included the 8th Forca Publica Battalion, two cavalry squadrons, and the “14th of July” Volunteer Infantry Battalion with one battery of artillery. A Federal assault on the town began on July 26 at 10.00am, with massive frontal assaults on the Constitutionalist trenches. The attackers suffered horrendous losses but kept on coming, overwhelming the defenses by the evening and forcing a general withdrawal of the rebel army. Over the next few weeks, the Federal Army took the towns of Faxina and Buri, suffering heavy losses on each occasion. Their hard-won victories had, however, totally destroyed the already weak Constitutionalist forces in the south. Having captured 462 prisoners and taken 800 precious rifles and two 75mm guns, they could have pressed on to Sao Paulo. Federal losses, and sheer exhaustion, stopped any immediate advance, and any combat-ready troops were sent instead to put down a revolt by pro-Constitutionalist troops in their rear. President Vargas, meanwhile, was not content to simply sit in his palace and get reports on the fighting, visiting the front on at least one occasion. He took his entourage of military and civilian officials to within a few miles of the Constitutionalist fortifications to observe their bombardment.

**Rebel pilots of the Paulista or Constitutionalista air arm are pictured during the 1932 revolution against President Vargas' government. The rebels had a small number of military and civilian aircraft, including some Potez 25 light bombers brought in by defecting government pilots. They also had a few civilian US-made Waco planes adapted as light bombers by the rebels. Legalista or government forces also had to rely on a mix of military and adapted civilian planes, but they just had more of them. (Cody Images)**

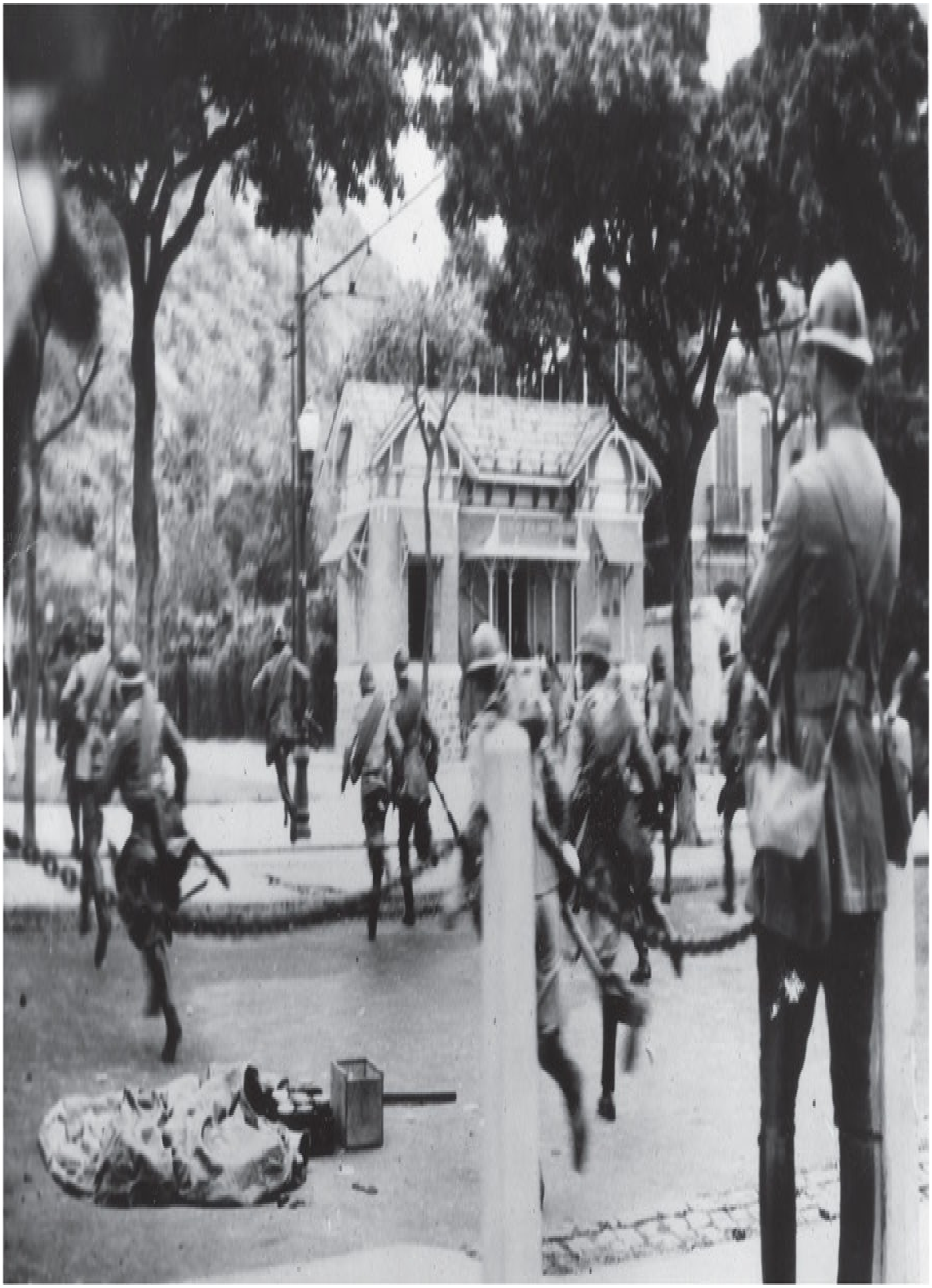
## The Air War

The war in the air during the 1932 revolution was as one sided as the ground war, with the Constitutionalists having only 16 planes at the start of the conflict. These included a few military planes, like the Potez 25 light bomber and the Waco fighters flown to rebel lines by their Sao Paulo based pilots. During the war, they also received a couple of French-made NiD 72 fighters, flown in by defecting pilots, and four modern Curtiss Falcon O-1E light bombers purchased from Chile. On the Federal side there was a total of 57 aircraft, with at least 12 Potez 25 light bombers, which formed the backbone of their bombing force. During the conflict, the Federal Air Force placed orders with several manufacturers, but only ten Waco 10 CSO fighter-bombers arrived in time to see service. Both air forces spent most of the conflict bombing each other's trenches and little air combat took place. The Federales did have two aircraft shot down, and another five were either damaged in air raids or lost in flying accidents. Constitutionalist losses were also light, but they had far fewer aircraft to lose, and both their Potez 25s were put out of action. Federal light bombers did contribute to their victory by the daily air attacks against the already demoralized Constitutionalist troops, who had no shelters. The Constitutionalists did at least have air superiority on the Southern Front, but that was only because the Federal Air Force chose not to station any of their aircraft in that region.

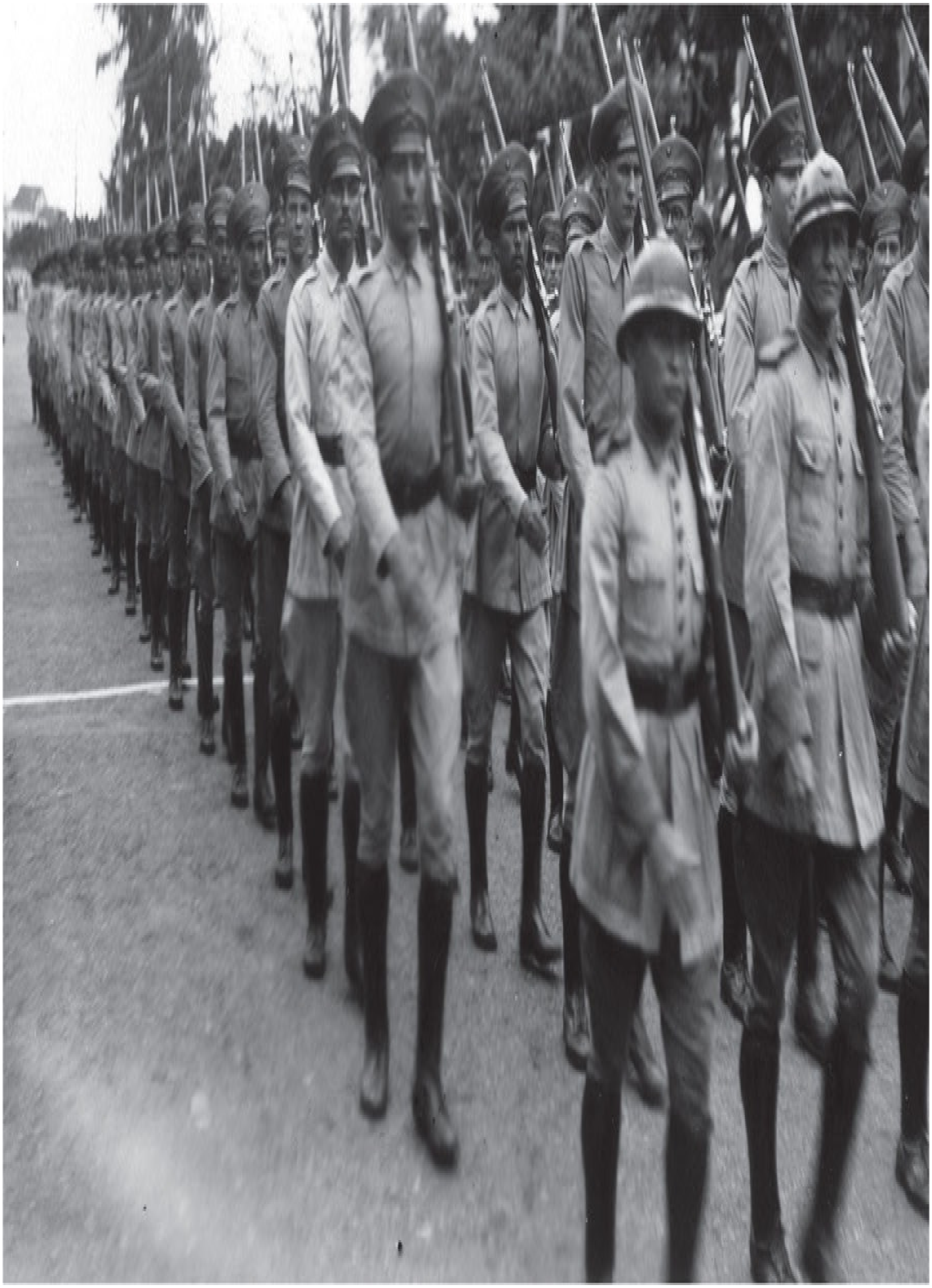
**Paulista machine gunners fire their captured Hotchkiss M1914 towards Federal Army positions during the 1932 revolution. The rebel Paulistas, or Constitutionalists, had a shortage of most weaponry, especially small arms. If they had had more rifles, they could have mobilized the hundreds of thousands of volunteers who came forward during the first heady days of the revolution. (Cody Images)**

## The End of the War

By late September the Constitutionalists were on the defensive on every front and were usually outnumbered and outgunned. In their positions along the Paranapanema River for instance, only 3,975 Constitutionalists faced 12,000–15,000 Legalista troops with 47 field guns. It was the same on the other fronts, with the only rebel hope now being belated rebellions in other anti-Vargas states. One rebellion in Minas Gerais State was beaten before it began, and another in Rio Grande do Sul that did take place was soundly defeated. With no help coming from the rest of Brazil the Constitutionalists were now totally isolated, and morale fell sharply. By September, the outnumbered and outgunned Constitutionalists had lost their earlier enthusiasm and were ready to surrender. The Constitutionalist commanders met and made a declaration on September 27 that victory was now an impossibility. On September 29, a peace deal was agreed and the short-lived but costly rebellion was over. Casualties in the 1932 fighting were estimated at 1,050 Federal troops and 2,200 Constitutionalists. Another source quotes the Constitutionalist losses at between 630 and 1,000 dead, including 150 volunteers from other states. A US military attaché, who was in Brazil during the conflict, was given a figure of 3,800 Federal Army casualties. President Vargas was shrewd enough to realize that the rebels had some justification for launching their rebellion and chose to be magnanimous in victory. His punishment of the defeated Constitutionalists was limited to sending 200 of their leaders into exile in Portugal.



**Loyalist troops rush into action in the center of Rio de Janiero against the Communist rising of November 1935. The Communist revolt took place in three cities, Rio, Natal, and Retife, but in none of these did the workers join in. Without the support of the ordinary Brazilians the revolt was doomed to failure, and the Vargas government soon gained control. President Vargas used the revolt as an excuse to push forward his aim of greater control over the running of the government. (Cody Images)**

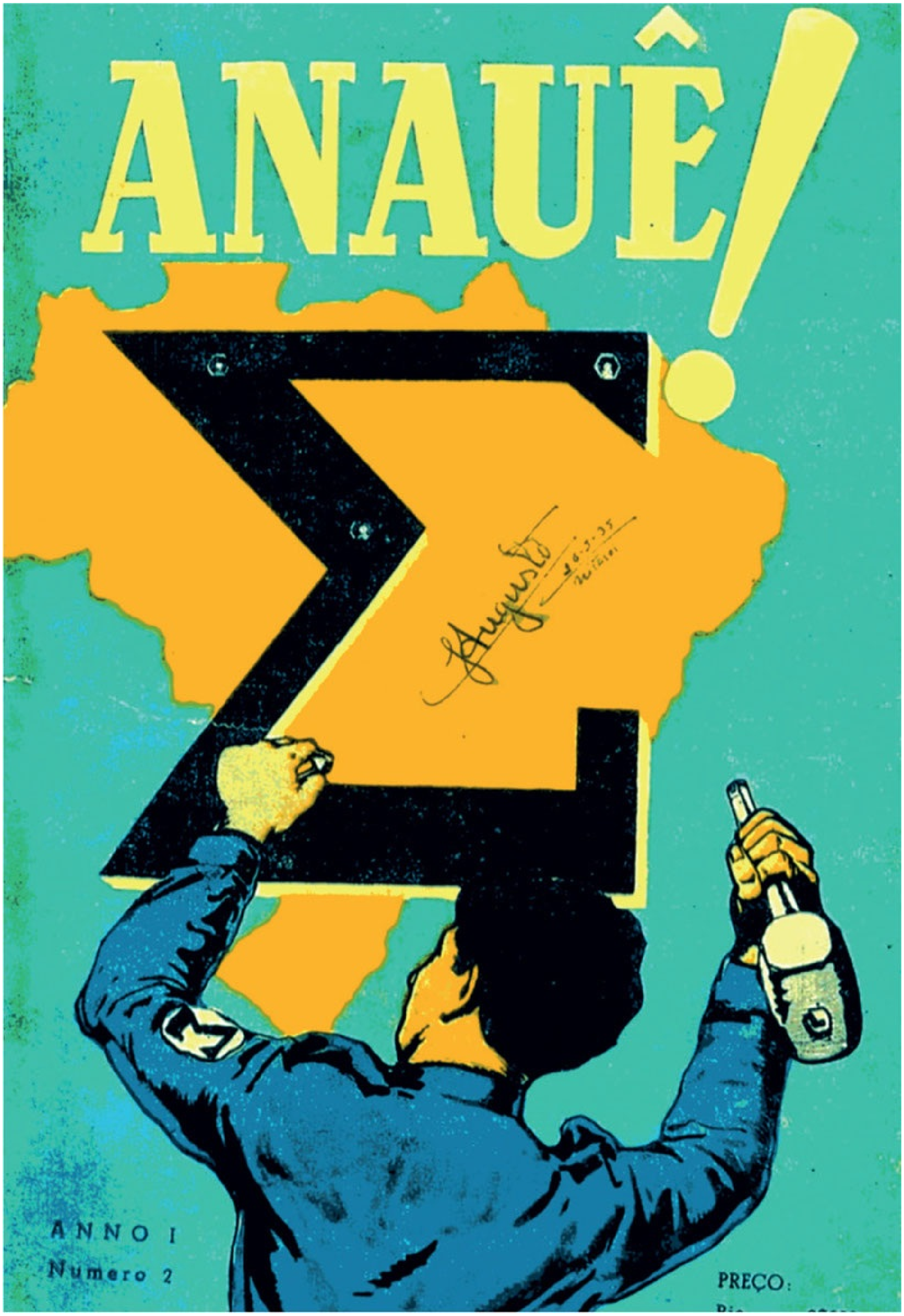


**Brazilian troops march past the reviewing stand during their country's independence celebrations on September 7, 1936. They are being reviewed by the governor of Pernambuco State, and some are wearing their new issue uniform. This uniform includes the fiber helmet, shaped like the French M1915 steel helmet but without its protective qualities. (Cody Images)**

## The Communist Rebellion 1935

In the early 1930s, Brazil, like most other countries in the world, saw the rise of its own fascist party, known as the "Integralist Action Party." This party was formed in 1932 and its rapid growth saw the usual left-wing response in opposition to its fascist policies. Opposition to the Integralists surfaced with the creation of the National Liberation Alliance, or ANL. Because the official Brazilian Communist Party had been banned in 1927, the ANL was the only political force willing to fight the Fascists. President Vargas reacted in turn by banning the ANL in July 1935, and the left-wing group now looked at beginning armed resistance to effect change. This "revolution" was to be led by the hero of the left-wing in Brazil in the 1920s, Luis Carlos Prestes. After his legendary campaigns in the mid-1920s, Prestes had ended up in exile in Moscow, where he was feted as a revolutionary by the Soviet Union. He was given a seat on the Executive Committee of the Comintern, the Soviet-sponsored international organizing body for worldwide revolution. In 1935 he was secretly brought back to Brazil to lead the revolution being organized by the ANL. His prestige helped to gain some support, especially from army officers with left-wing sympathies. These sympathies were used to organize a series of military revolts, with the first breaking out in late November. This began in the city of Natal on the 23rd, followed by a revolt in the city of Retife on the 24th. A final military revolt started on the 27th in the capital, Rio de Janeiro, but no other cities or regions moved to support the ANL. Any hoped-for support from the workers did not materialize and the isolated rebels were soon overcome by troops loyal to Vargas. The organization of these revolts was poor and any military units that did try to join the revolution were easily contained by troops loyal to Vargas.

Thousands of Brazilian civilians were arrested in the aftermath of the failed Communist rebellion, including Luis Prestes, who was imprisoned and tortured by the government. Other victims of the government crackdown included any opponents of President Vargas, regardless of their political affiliation. In reality the Communist ANL played right into Vargas' hands, as he now used their rebellion as a pretext for taking more powers for his government. In November 1935, the Congress voted to grant him additional powers, followed in November 1937 by a pro-Vargas coup. The promised 1938 general election was canceled and a period of dictatorship followed that lasted until 1945.


ANAUÊ!
Augusto
26.5.35
ANNO I
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PREÇO:

**This propaganda poster of the 1930s shows a green-shirted Brazilian Fascist Integralist hammering home the symbol of the party on the map of Brazil. The slogan “Anaue!” is taken, as many Integralist slogans were, from the Indian Tupi language and translates as “You are my brother!” It was intended to mimic the German Nazi Party’s “Sieg Heil!”, as well as the Italian Fascist Party’s “Ave!”, shouted as rallying cries to their followers. (Author’s Collection)**

## The Integralist Putsch 1938

The Integralists were a fascist movement founded by modernist writer Plinio Salgado in 1932. Salgado’s Fascist Party, with its uniforms, flags, and other paraphernalia, attracted young Conservatives and right-wing radicals into its ranks. In May 1938, the Integralists attempted a coup d’état against the Vargas government popularly known as the “Pjama Putsch.” This coup was, in fact, in two parts, with an earlier attack on the president on March 11 ending in utter farce. A number of Fascist leaders were arrested in the aftermath of this first attempt, but Vargas was clearly not concerned by the threat. The second, and more serious, coup attempt took place on the night of May 11, 1938. The 20 or so Integralists taking part were disguised as Marines and their first objective was the kidnapping of the Rio de Janeiro chief of police. They also released from jail a number of prisoners taken during the attempted coup in March. Their next objective was Guanabara Palace, where President Vargas and his family were sleeping. The Fascists wanted to take Vargas prisoner so that they could impress on him their unhappiness with his policies. When they tried to invade the palace grounds, they were challenged by a few security guards. The guards were soon joined by President Vargas and his daughter, who were ready to defend themselves in their nightclothes. The defenders also included Vargas’ personal servants and anyone else who could fire a pistol to hold off the Fascists until help arrived. A gun battle ensued that ended when a rescue force of armed police and soldiers arrived at the palace. The outnumbered Integralists now withdrew, leaving behind most of their men – a total of 20 dead and wounded. This time

Vargas was less accommodating – the Fascist Party was banned, and most of its followers and many of its members were arrested.

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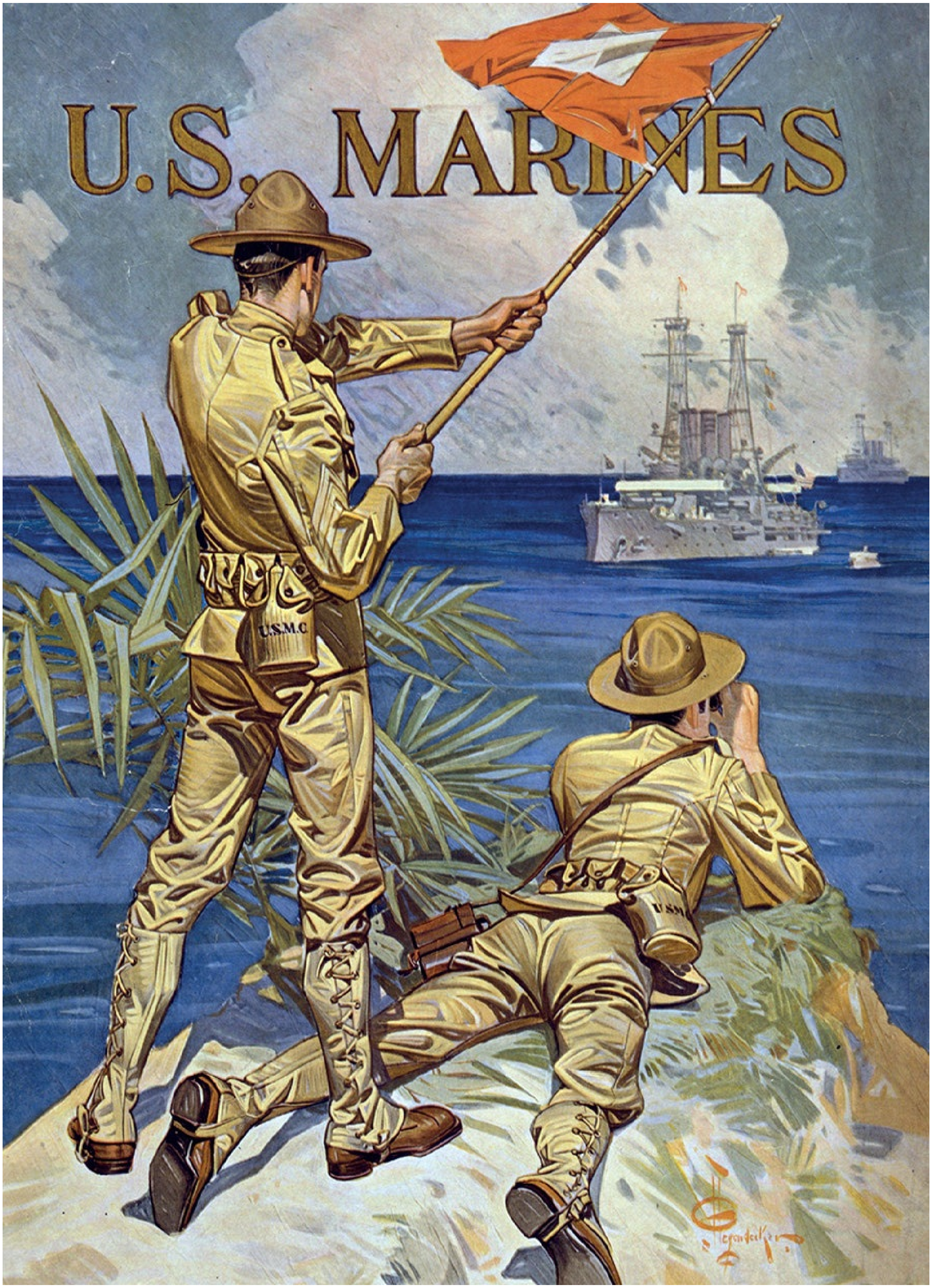
* Although duly elected as president, Nilo Procopio Pecanha was not due to take office until November 1922, and it was the incumbent, Pessoa, who dealt with the Tenentes Revolt.

# “COLOSSUS IN THE NORTH”

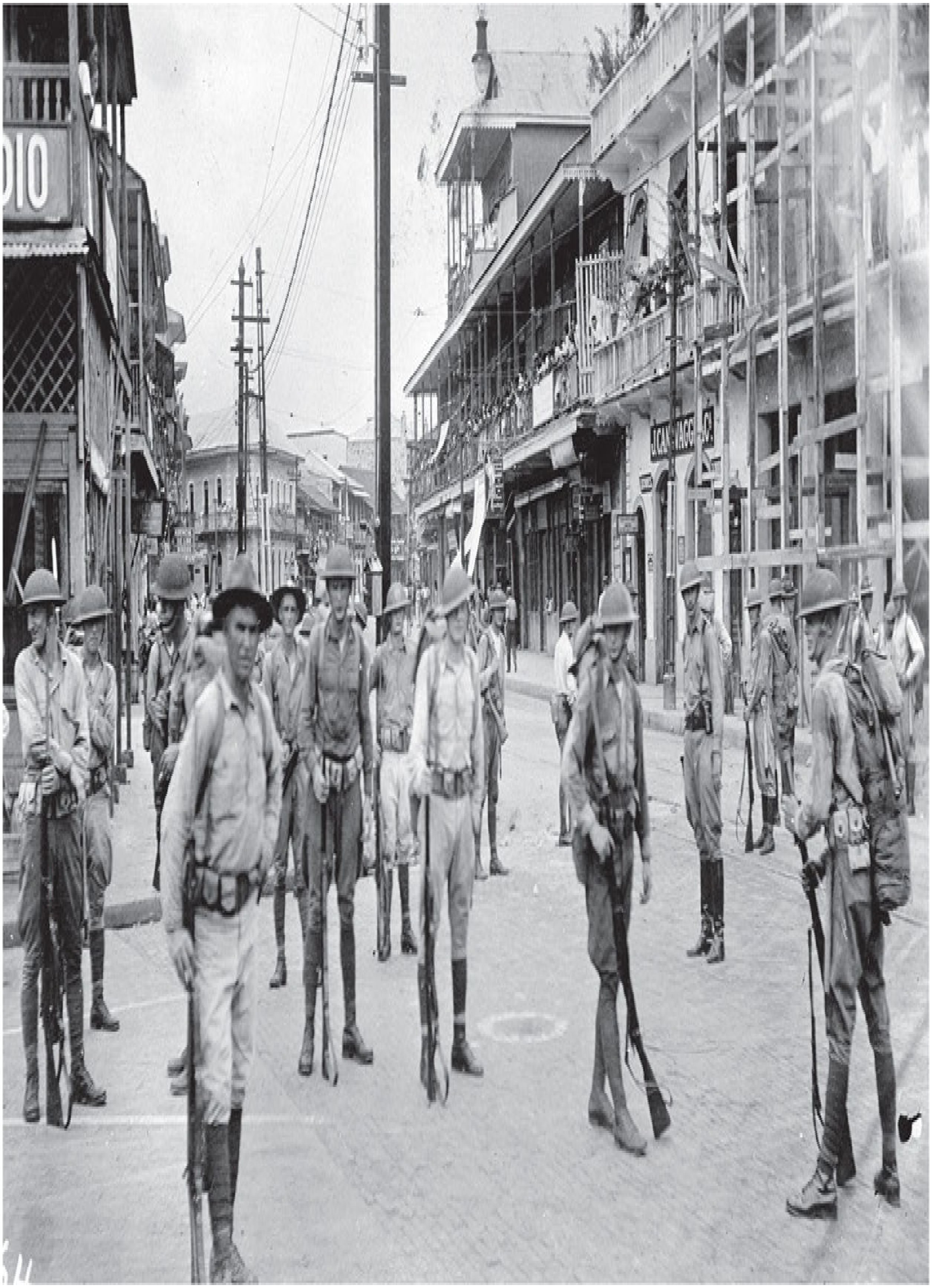

U.S. MARINES
U.S.M.C
USM
JC Leyendecker

**A recruiting poster for the US Marines Corps in the 1910s shows the kind of adventure that a volunteer could expect in the days of US gunboat diplomacy in Latin America. The multiple interventions in the Caribbean Islands and in Central America almost exclusively involved the Marine Corps. Mexico was the exception, with US Army troops crossing the border during the Punitive Expedition of 1916. (Library of Congress)**

Until 1898, the United States of America had taken little real interest in the internal politics of the countries of Latin America, so long as US interests and trade remained unaffected. The USA had acquired some Pacific islands in the mid-1800s and its navy had made landings in China, Formosa, Japan, and Korea in the late 1800s. There had been some talk of a US annexation of the French and Spanish parts of the island of Hispaniola in the 1870s but this was not pursued. In reality, the US had enough to deal with developing its own vast territories without what it viewed as unnecessary commitments in Latin America. This being said, during the late 1800s, US Marines had been deployed in Central America and the Caribbean to protect their government's growing businesses and other interests there. These interventions included eight separate military operations between 1867 and 1900 in Haiti, the French-speaking half of Hispaniola. They had also intervened on no less than nine occasions in Nicaragua, usually officially to "restore order." US foreign policy changed dramatically in 1898, however, when the USA went to war with the declining power of colonial Spain. Its victory in the ten-week war saw all the Spanish Empire's former possessions transferred into US hands. Besides the Philippines, Hawaii, and Guam in the Pacific, the Caribbean islands of Puerto Rico and Cuba were now also under US control. Cuba was placed under American military government and Puerto Rico was annexed by the USA. Although the USA had fought the war nominally in support of Cuban independence, they now seemed reluctant to relinquish their hold on the island. As before, the USA would prove quite willing to intervene in Latin America if a state's internal political situation was seen to represent a threat to US commercial interests. One particular rationale given for US interventions in the region would be to ensure that debts owed to US banks by the countries of the region were honored. In December 1902, Britain and Germany had imposed a naval blockade of Venezuela in order to ensure payments of international debts. Since the 1820s, US policy had sought to avoid European interference in the Americas. US leaders sought to ensure Latin America honored its debts, not least to avoid any future repetition of European intervention in the region. US investments, both government and private, in Central America, Cuba, Haiti, and the Dominican Republic increased in the first decades of the 20th century. During a 20-year period between 1898 and 1920, for instance, American-owned companies had increased their investment in Cuba fourfold to $200 million. The USA felt justified in protecting these investments from the civil wars, rebellions, and coups d’état that it felt blighted the countries of the region.

## Panama 1901– 34

US intervention in Panama began in 1901, while the Central American territory was still officially part of Colombia. In April 1902, the USA interfered again, with the excuse that it was protecting its citizens’ lives, during a brief civil war there. In September of the same year, US troops were dispatched to the region, staying until November, to ensure that the US-owned trans-isthmus railway was kept open. In 1903, the US-backed secession of Panama from Colombia (see Chapter 1) gave the Americans virtual carte blanche in the newly independent country. Part of the price the Panamanians had to pay for their independence was a treaty to allow the US to control a zone around the Panama Canal, then under construction. This treaty allowed the USA to station troops along the route of the canal and move in additional troops if the canal was threatened by civil disturbances in Panama. In 1904, the US coerced General Esteban Huertas, commander of the rebellious Panamanian troops, into disbanding his army. The army was replaced by a “toothless” National Guard, whose only role was keeping the peace in Panama. Between November 1903 and January 1914, the US had a constant military presence in Panama, with the first US Marines landing in 1908. The Marines were to maintain a strong presence in Panama for the next decade, deploying additional Marines on three occasions before 1918. The opening of the Panama Canal to traffic in 1914 gave the US a strategic figleaf for their presence there. US Marines occupied the Panamanian province of Chiriqui, outside the Canal Zone, from 1918 to 1920 to “maintain public order” and to control “electoral disturbances.” In 1921, Panama went to war with its neighbor Costa Rica without an army (see Chapter 4). The US Marine presence was increased to deal with any problems resulting from the conflict. In October 1925, US Army troops occupied Panama City to break a rent strike and “keep general order.”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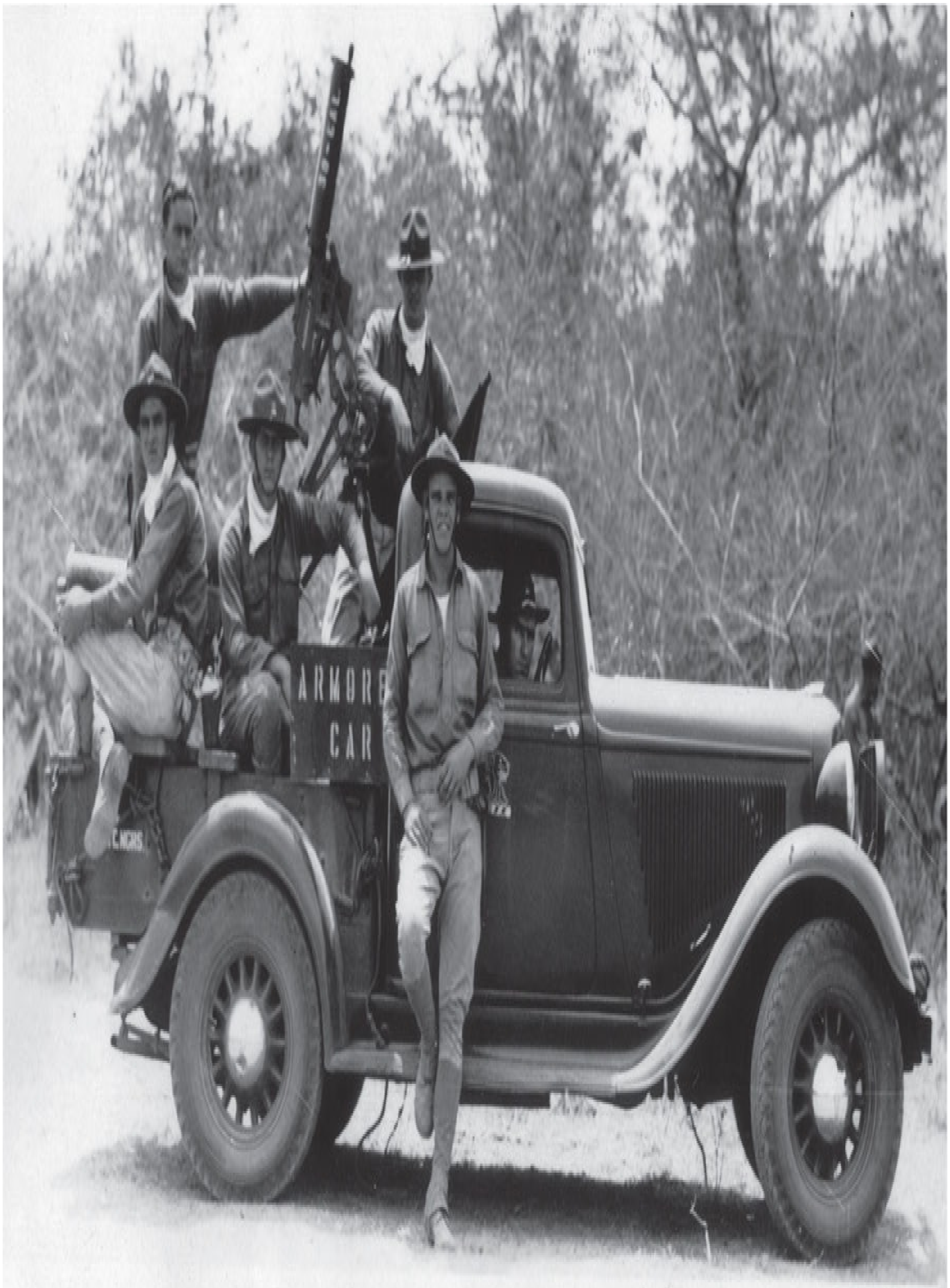
**US troops patrol the streets of Panama City in October 1925, when 600 of them were sent to control riots by disgruntled tenants and strikes by workers. In 1936, the US finally relinquished its right to intervene in the politics of Panama without recourse to the government there. Five years later, however, the commander of the Panamanian National Guard, Ricardo Adolfo, overthrew President Arias. He did not enact his coup, of course, without having first cleared it with the US State Department.**
**(Bettmann/Getty Images)**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**US Marines pose for a photograph during a patrol in Panama in 1933 on their patrol car armed with a Browning M1917 heavy machine gun. The continued presence of US troops in the Panama Canal zone was a guarantee of the security of this vital supply link. By this date the days of official US intervention in the politics of Central America and the Caribbean were coming to a close. A new “Good Neighbor” policy of supporting pro-US regimes in the region was just another way to influence the region. (Author’s Collection)**

## Cuba 1902–22

Although the military government relinquished control of Cuba in 1902, a new law introduced the following year set the scene for continued interference by the USA in the politics of their weaker neighbor. In 1903 the USA introduced the Platt Amendment, which allowed their forces to intervene in Cuba whenever they saw fit to do so. This policy was inserted into the Cuban Constitution, despite strong opposition from its politicians. The first military intervention in Cuba by US Marines took place in October 1906, when a brigade of 425 officers and 6,196 men landed. They operated mainly in Santa Clara province, where a civil war had broken out, and their main role was to protect US business interests there. During their stay of just over two years in Cuba, the Marines tried to reorganize and retrain the Cuban Rural Guard. With the situation calmer, the US Marines settled into a fairly peaceful garrison existence, the last of them being withdrawn on February 6, 1909. The next intervention, in 1912, was in response to the so-called “Negro Rebellion” lead by Evarista Estenoz, in which poorly armed rebels initially attacked Cuban military and police posts. Estenoz was killed in June, his place taken by Pedro Inonnet, who also fell in action the following month, virtually ending the revolt. Many of the participants were Afro-Cubans who had fought for independence from Spain in 1898 and had then been abandoned and forgotten by their Hispanic comrades. At the start of the rebellion there were some 3,000 rebels, armed mostly with machetes; by late June only around 400 remained. They received no support during their doomed rebellion and between 3,000 and 6,000 Afro-Cubans were killed, many being massacred by government forces. A total of 2,789 Marines was sent to Cuba under the designation, of the 1st Provisional Marine Brigade and took part in the supression of the rebellion alongside local forces. Once the rebellion had been defeated, the Marines left Cuba, with the last men embarking on August 2. Five years later, in August 1917, a Liberal insurgency against the Conservative Cuban Government began. The rebels operated at first in western Cuba, but when a force of 1,000 US Marines was dispatched, they shifted activity to the east of the island. In December 1917, a further 1,000 Marines landed, with the task of protecting US-owned businesses on the island. After the initial fighting had calmed down in mid-1918, strikes by pro-Liberal sugar workers created a period of general upheaval that meant a further 1,120 Marines had to be sent to Cuba, and this force of around 3,000 remained on the island until 1922. By January 1922, the only US presence in Cuba was concentrated at their naval base at Guantanamo Bay.

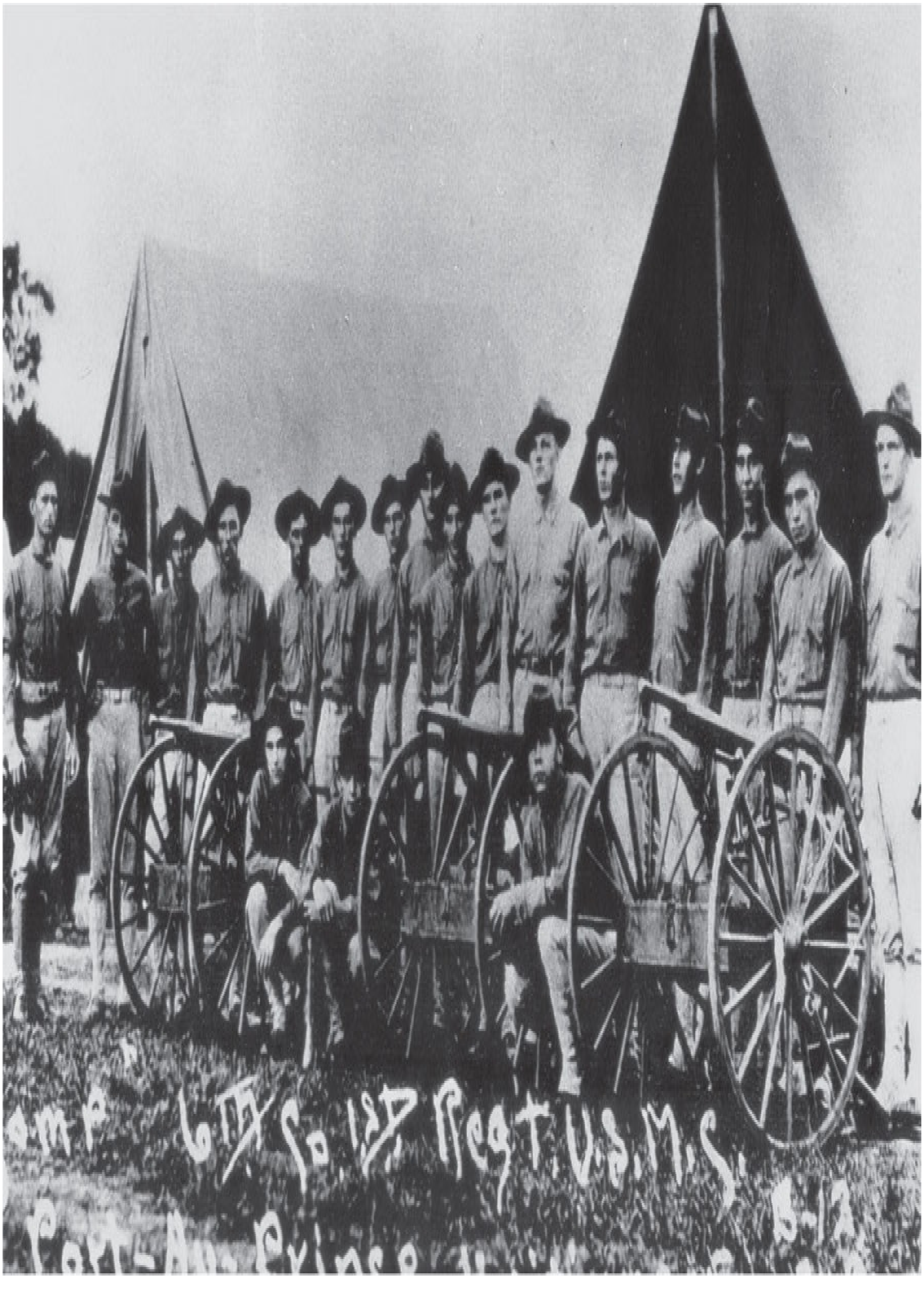
## The Dominican Republic 1904–24

The USA’s first act of gunboat diplomacy against the Dominican Republic took place in 1904, when US warships bombarded towns held by local rebels. They had the temerity to insult the US flag, and paid a heavy price, with a number killed in the attacks. In the same year, the Dominican Republic was in danger of reneging on its debts to the USA, and the government of President Theodore Roosevelt decided to act. In 1905, US customs agents were sent to the island to enforce the payments, and their presence was an insult to the Dominicans’ national pride. The US customs agents, nevertheless, collected all the charges due to the Republic efficiently, with 55 percent of customs revenues passed to the US Government and 45 percent to the Dominicans. From 1905 to 1907, the Dominican Republic’s debts to the US were reduced from $40 million to $17 million. This fiscal propriety was ruined by the revolution of 1911–12 (see Chapter 1), followed by another in April 1914, and the USA decided to intervene to “protect their interests.” In November 1915, a US Marine force took control of the Dominican Republic’s major ports and began to restore order to the island. Campillo Perez, the governor of a south-eastern province, refused to accept the situation and organized a revolt with a few hundred nationalists. US Marines captured his stronghold, but not before he had led a 200-strong band into the interior of the island to begin a guerrilla war. The revolt spread and “Gavillero” rebel bands sprang up all over the Dominican Republic, fighting the Marines from 1916 to 1924. In an effort to control the rebellion, martial law was introduced and the Marines confiscated a total of 53,000 firearms, consisting mostly of ancient muskets along with 14,000 machetes and other edged weapons. The rebel force consisted of 800 full-time guerrillas and a large number of part-time fighters. In 1916, this force tried to take on the US Marines occupying the Dominican Republic in conventional battles. The two larger battles, at Guayacanas in July and San Francisco de Macoris in November, were one-sided affairs. The US Marines numbered some 3,000, with the support of six ground-attack aircraft. They were also supported by the locally raised Guardia Republicana, which by 1918 had reached a strength of 1,200 men commanded by 80 Marine officers. Guerrilla activity was to continue into the 1920s, but at a much lower level, with the Gavilleros suffering heavy losses whenever they clashed with the Marines. By 1921 the main guerrilla groups had been defeated, suffering a total of almost 3,000 killed and leaving only a few hundred “bandits,” as the Marines described them, at large. Guerrilla resistance continued until the Marines withdrew in 1924, after the election of General Horacio Vazquez as president. He was overthrown in 1930 by the commander of the newly established Dominican National Army. Initially, this officer, Rafael Leonidas Trujillo, did not take on the role of president, but, in a corrupt election filled with threats and lavish promises, he was elected to office later that year. Trujillo would prove to be one of the most brutal and corrupt dictators in Latin America and would rule until his assassination in 1961.

**Marines of the 7th Regiment take part in a route march through the jungles of eastern Cuba in 1917. This particular intervention, which began in February 1917, was called the “Sugar Intervention” and was to last until August 1919. It was to counter the strikes by the sugar workers, whose actions threatened the interests of US businesses in Cuba. It was a classic example of the US Government’s protection of their “interests” in the Caribbean and Central America. (Library of Congress)**

**Cuban rebels are photographed in the early 1900s armed only with machetes during the first US intervention in their country. Popular opposition to the US presence in Cuba led to several rebellions in the first decades of the 20th century. US Marines landed on the island in 1906 and initially stayed for two years, but were to return several times over the years. (Library of Congress)**

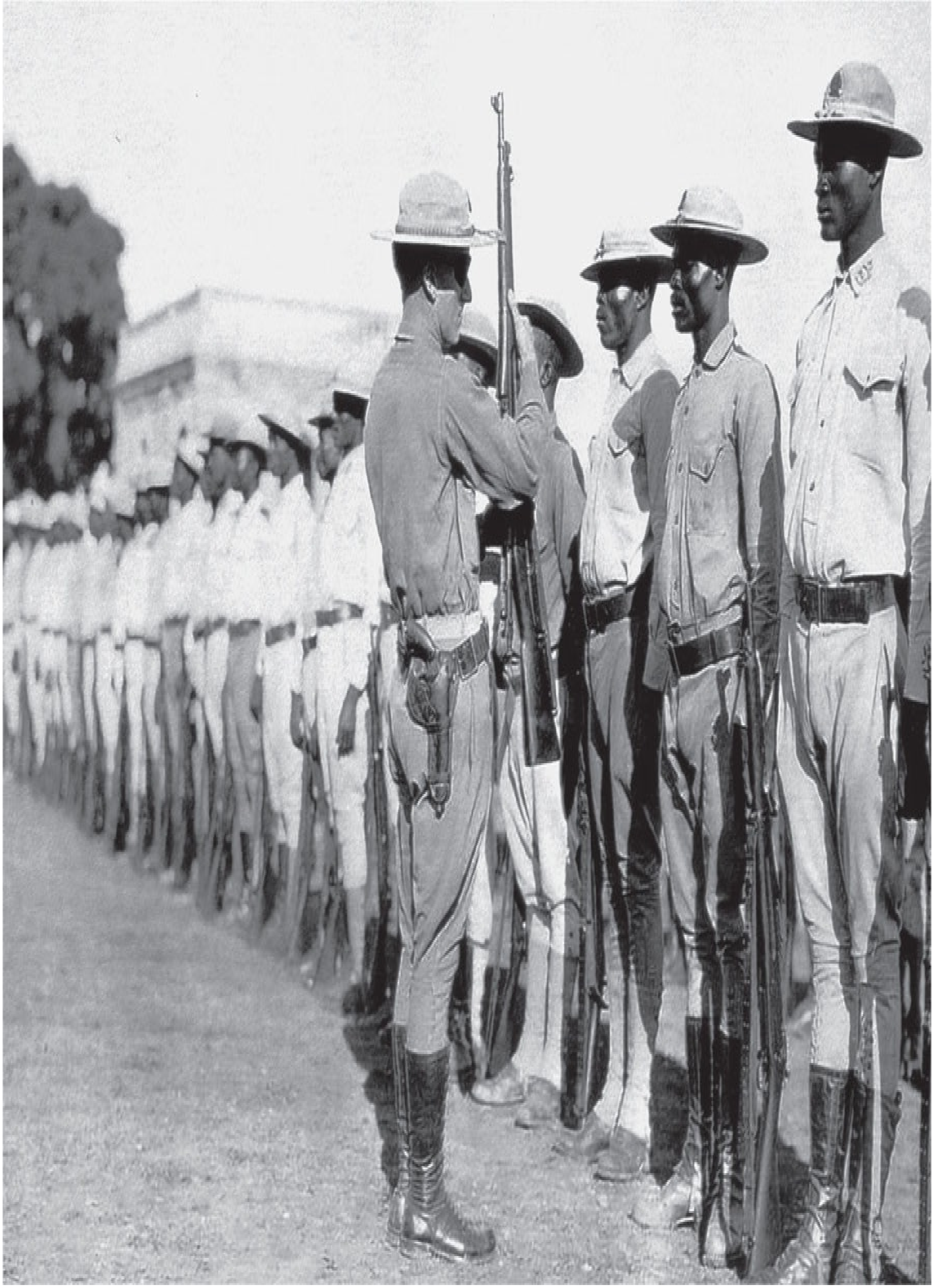
**Marines take cover in undergrowth after coming under fire from Gavilleros on a hill in the Dominican Republic in 1920. US Marines went into the Dominican Republic in 1916 and stayed until 1924, and had to fight an anti-guerrilla war against the rebels for much of that period. There were about 1,800 Marines in the Dominican Republic at any one time fighting 1,000 poorly armed Gavilleros at the height of the guerrilla war. (Library of Congress)**


amp 6th Co. 1st Regt. U.S.M.C.
8-12
Port-Au-Prince

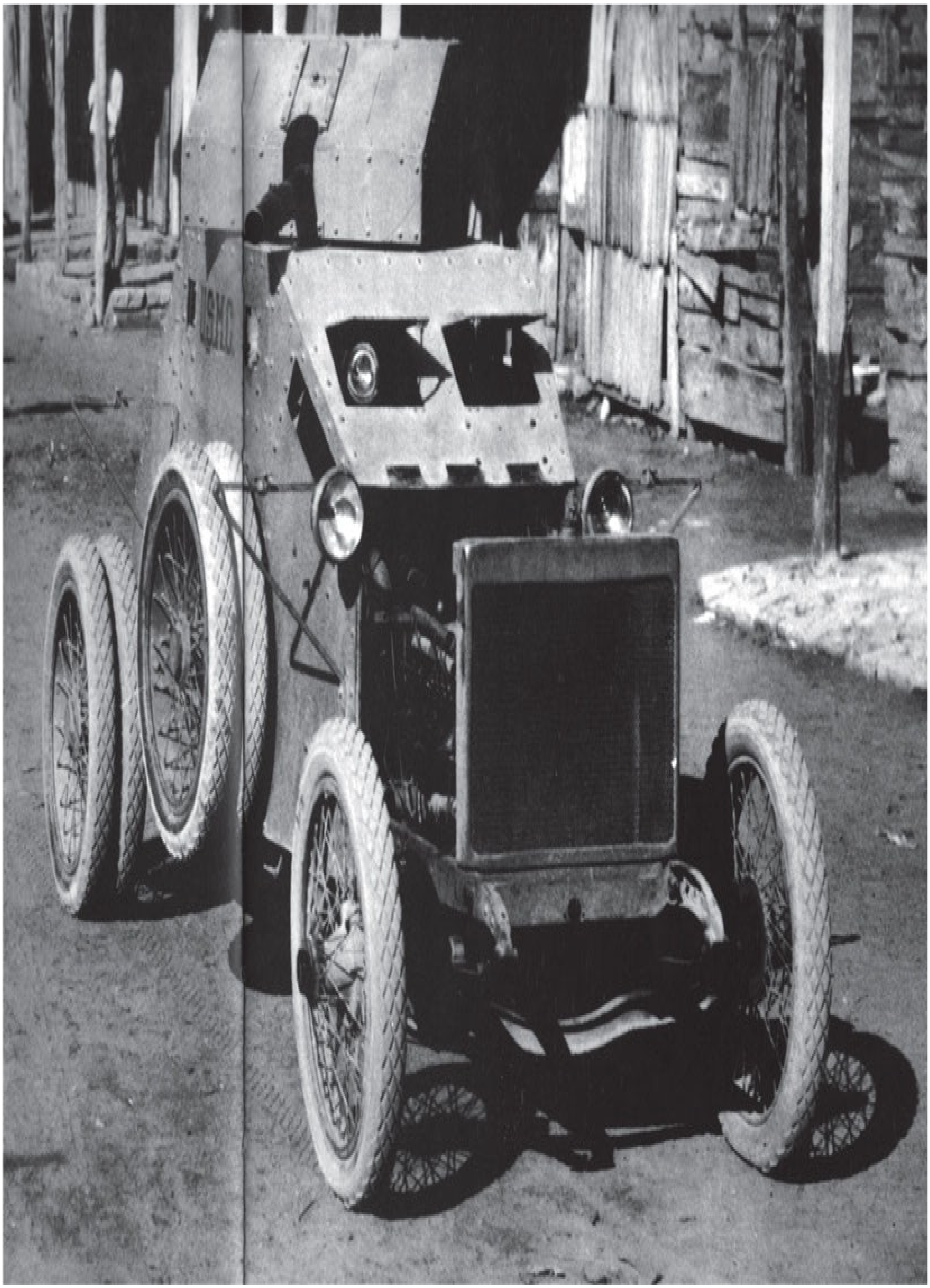
**The machine gun company of the 1st Marine Regiment is seen in its camp outside the Haitian capital of Port-au-Prince in 1915. US intervention in Haiti that year was intended to “restore order” to a chaotic country and resulted in a Marines presence there for 19 years. Resistance to the US occupation of Haiti by the Cacos was determined, even though the rebels were fighting with few rifles and little ammunition and machetes. (Library of Congress)**

## Haiti 1905–34

The USA had interfered with the government of the Caribbean republic of Haiti on a number of occasions in the late 1800s. Between 1867 and 1900, US Marines had landed on the island eight times to restore order to the poorly governed state. The US customs authorities took control of the customs revenues of Haiti in 1905, for the same reason as in the Dominican Republic. Haiti’s law and order were dependent on its poorly trained and officered Gendarmerie, whose men were nearly all ill with syphilis and other diseases. By 1914 the country was in total chaos, and in July 1915, its president was lynched and dismembered by a mob in the capital, Port-au-Prince. As Haiti dissolved into further turmoil, US Marines landed to restore order to the country. Once order had been restored in the capital, 2,000 Marines were sent to the north of Haiti to subdue a group of poorly armed Nationalist insurgents, known as “Cacos” after a local bird of prey. The Cacos, who had few firearms and were mainly armed with machetes, fought bravely but were no match for Marines with machine guns and mountain artillery. Throughout 1915 this one-sided guerrilla war continued, with the Cacos suffering heavy casualties when they sallied out from their mountain strongholds. In the last battle of 1915, a Marine force of three companies stormed the Cacos fortress of Fort Riviere, killing 50 rebels with no losses themselves. In the aftermath of the 1915 revolt, the US Marines had reorganized, rearmed, and retrained the local Haitian Gendarmarie. This “puppet” force was not particularly effective, but did manage to maintain order in Haiti until April 1919, when a second Cacos rebellion broke out. This revolt was organized by Haitian patriot Charlemagne Peralte, who gave himself the grand title “Chief of the Revolutionary Forces Against the American Nation on Haitian Soil.” His 5,000 or so Cacos guerrillas were poorly armed with machetes and pikes and had only 300 captured rifles and muskets with a few rounds each. They faced 1,000 Marines armed with M1895 machine guns and 2,700 Gendarmes who acted as auxiliaries. The guerrillas fought a series of 131 engagements, most one-sided skirmishes where they were totally outgunned. In November, Peralte was killed by a spy in his camp and his body publicly displayed by the authorities. His place was taken by Benoit Batraville, who commanded 2,000 guerrillas until his death in action in May 1920. Both rebel leaders had led assaults on the defenses of Port-au-Prince, the first in October 1919 and the second in early 1920. Taking the capital and holding it was the only way that either leader could have hoped to rally the Haitian population behind them. The US Marines who fought during this second rebellion were not of the same caliber as those who fought in 1915. From 1917 the best Marines had been sent to fight in World War I, and those left in Haiti were regarded as second-line troops. Fighting against the Cacos continued into 1920, and when it ended, 3,000 starving rebels surrendered to the US authorities. The casualty lists during the second rebellion show the “David and Goliath” nature of the fighting – 2,000 rebels were killed and 10,000 captured, while the US Marines lost a total of seven killed and ten wounded and the Haitian Gendarmarie 27 killed and 45 wounded. Once the country had been pacified, the Marines established a fairly effective administration, which improved the situation in Haiti. They introduced modern sanitation and raised the general health of the population before they left the island in 1934.



**Guardsmen of the Haitian National Guard are seen on parade in 1920 being drilled by a US Marine officer. In 1916 the occupying US Marines disbanded the “unreliable” Haitian Army and formed the apolitical National Guard. The US policy of recruiting, training, and arming reliable military forces in the Caribbean and Central America was fairly successful. These guardsmen are armed with the Springfield M1903 rifle instead of the old Haitian Army’s out-of-date muskets. (Library of Congress)**


USMC

**This White armored car of the 2nd Marine Regiment is trundling through the streets of Port-au-Prince in Haiti armed only with a single Lewis machine gun. Five of this type of armored car were sent to Haiti as part of the intervention force but proved unable to cope with the terrible roads of the country. The White was one of a number of early armored cars used in Mexico, Haiti, and other countries where the US Marines served in the 1910s and 1920s. (Library of Congress)**

## Central America 1900–34

The USA would intervene in the two Central American countries of Nicaragua and Honduras more often than anywhere else between 1900 and 1934. This was because both countries had large US investments in them, especially by the huge banana companies like the United Fruit Company. US companies also had major investments in Guatemala, but its government was more stable. US Marines intervened in Nicaragua during the 1909 civil war and occupied the port of Bluefields from May to September 1910 (see Chapter 1). They were deployed in Nicaragua again from August 1912 until January 1913 to help supervise the country’s elections. A small Marine force was stationed in the capital, Managua, for a further 12 years, withdrawing in 1925. Within a year they were back in force because of the Liberal–Conservative civil war and then the ensuing anti-US insurgency, led by Augusto Sandino from 1927 to 1933 (see Chapter 4). Honduras was wracked by a series of civil wars from the 1900s until the 1930s, which led to a number of US interventions, first in 1903, then another in 1907, and additionally in 1911, 1912, 1919, 1924, and 1925. On every occasion the US sited the need to protect their citizens and their investments from the various armies roaming the Honduran countryside. Guatemala, Costa Rica, and El Salvador were left alone by the US during the period between 1900 and 1934, as long as their governments remained pro-American in character. In 1921 the US had suggested to the Guatemalans that their president, Carlos Herrera, was being troublesome. He was causing problems for the United Fruit Company, so the Guatemalans complied with the US prompting and overthrew him.

**In this posed photograph, a unit of US Marines fires at Nicaraguan guerrillas during the 1912 intervention in the country. They had been sent to support the ineffectual but pro-US government of President Diaz against the Liberal opposition. The occupation of Nicaragua was resisted fiercely by Liberal politicians and their armed supporters in a number of small-scale battles with the Marines. This was not the first time that US Marines had intervened in some way in Nicaraguan politics, and in fact by 1912 there had been nine interventions. (Library of Congress)**

## Interventions in Mexico 1914–16

## Veracruz 1914

In 1914, during the rule of the Mexican dictator Huerta, the US, which despised Huerta, decided to take over the port of Veracruz. This was in response to the arrest of US sailors by the Mexicans during the Tampico Incident in early April 1914. One of Huerta’s rogue generals had arrested the sailors at the port of Tampico, causing a major diplomatic incident between the two countries. US President Woodrow Wilson gave orders for 1,200 US Navy troops to land in the port and they arrived on April 21, 1914. When they landed, they faced armed opposition from regular Mexican troops under the command of General Gustavo Maas. The general was an eccentric old man who sported a handlebar mustache and wore a plumed pickelhaube helmet similar to the German Kaiser’s. He was, however, fully prepared to fight for Veracruz and even released prisoners from the local jail to fight for him. He had also armed 300 local civilian volunteers fighting under the title of “Society of Defenders of the Port of Veracruz.” However, after some initial resistance by the 1,000 defenders, the threat of the guns of the US Fleet, anchored just outside the port, ended the fighting. General Maas and his men received orders to withdraw from the city and a seven-month period of US occupation began. To make sure there was no more trouble from the Mexican population, four regiments of the US 5th Infantry Brigade were landed to support the 3,446 US Marines who had joined the initial occupation force. For the rest of the occupation, the garrison of Veracruz remained at a steady 5,200 naval and infantry forces. While the fighting for Veracruz was underway, a German ship, the Ypiranga, had appeared off the port, supposedly full of Mauser rifles. The Mexican dictator, General Huerta, had been courted by Imperial Germany and promised a delivery of brand-new Mauser rifles for his embattled Federal troops. When the ship was inspected by US officials, it was instead found to have a cargo of Remington rifles ordered by Huerta from New York. These rifles would never reach Huerta, who was overthrown by the revolutionary armies of Villa and Carranza in July. The new Carranza government, which emerged from the victory over Huerta, was equally hostile to this US violation of Mexican sovereignty. Any complaints by Carranza about the continued US occupation of a major Mexican port were ignored by President Wilson. When the US Navy left Veracruz in late November 1914, there was no lessening of the tension between the Mexican and US governments. A delay by the US Government in recognizing Carranza as Mexican president until 1915 did nothing to improve relations between the two countries.

**Brigadier-General John. J. Pershing, the commander of the US Punitive Expedition into Mexico in March 1916, rides with his men across the Rio Grande. Pershing knew that the target for the invasion of Mexico, Pancho Villa, was already well hidden in his mountain hideouts. He had to try and pursue Villa without getting into any problems with the army of the Carranza government. As President Carranza was hostile to the US presence in his country, he did not give the support to Pershing he had promised. The whole expedition turned into a wild goose chase, and ended with the 10,000 US troops crossing the border back into Texas in March 1917. (Library of Congress)**

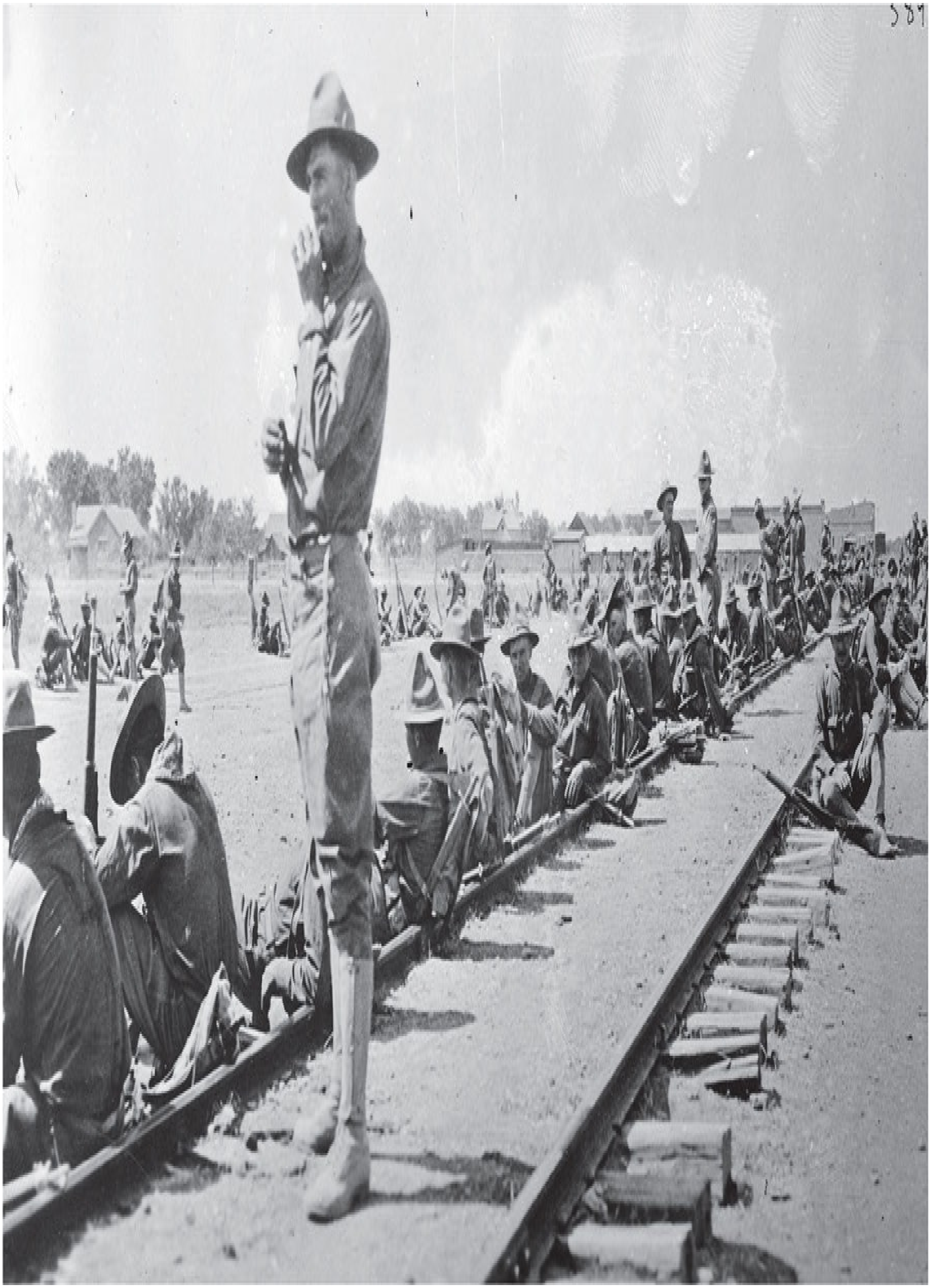
**A naval landing party from the US Fleet anchored off the port of Veracruz in 1914 patrols the town armed with Springfield M1903 rifles. They have adapted their tropical white uniforms by dyeing them with any color they could find, resulting in a myriad of shades of khaki clothing being produced. The two favorite dyes were reportedly coffee and rust, but any kind of brown material was utilized. Their so-called “Daisy Cup” canvas hats are worn in a variety of ways, giving the patrol a rather unmilitary bearing. (Library of Congress)**

NEW YORK CENTRAL
2082

**National Guardsmen from New York are called up during the rapid expansion of US forces during the course of the Punitive Expedition into Mexico in 1916. As part of this plan the National Guard were called up en masse and 112,000 of them were in staging areas in Texas and Arizona by the end of July 1916. They were ready just in case the situation in Mexico developed into a full-scale war between the USA and the Mexican Government of President Carranza. President Wilson was worried about the threat of war generally and had introduced a new act to meet this perceived danger. The National Defense Act of June 3, 1916 called for the creation of a 175,000-strong regular army over five years. (Library of Congress)**

## Pancho Villa’s Provocations Against the USA

The Mexican Revolution of 1910–20 was fought largely in the northern states of the country adjoining the US border. Although clashes between the US Army and the various Mexican factions along the border did occur, they were kept under control. Pancho Villa, who controlled the border states from 1913 until 1916, had imported huge amounts of arms from US companies. By late 1915, however, Villa had suffered a series of humiliating defeats (see Chapter 3) and his power was waning. When the US formally recognized his bitter rival, Carranza, as Mexican president in October 1915, Villa was enraged. He sought revenge against the USA and, in addition, wanted to revive his reputation on the Mexican stage. Villa decided that the only way to change the status quo in Mexico was to provoke the US Army into a full-scale invasion. Once the US Army had crossed the border, he and his remaining troops would fight the invaders and hopefully push them back across the Rio Grande. This would make him a national hero, and his former supporters, as well as other patriotic Mexicans, would flock to his banner. The best way to provoke the US was to launch a series of raids across the US–Mexican border and kill some “Yankees.” A number of small-scale raids were launched into the US border states of New Mexico, Texas, and Arizona. In response to these raids, US Army units were moved into strategic positions along the border and were put under the command of Brigadier-General John J. Pershing. In the meantime, Villa and his various commanders began to take out their frustration on any US citizens who fell into their hands in Mexico. The presence of General Pershing and his 8th Infantry Brigade in Texas, however, deterred Villa from any further expeditions across the border. In January 1916, 17 American mining engineers on their way to work in a mine at the invitation of the Mexican Government were taken from a train by Villistas. They were all lined up outside the train and executed in cold blood, causing outrage in Texas and Washington DC. Villa then decided to further provoke the US by crossing the border to launch a 500-man raid on the camp of the 13th Cavalry Regiment at Columbus, New Mexico. Although the US cavalrymen routed Villa's men, the Villistas stopped off on their way back to Mexico at the town of Columbus and killed ten civilians and 14 US soldiers. They looted the town and set fire to its buildings in an act calculated to finally provoke the kind of reaction that Pancho Villa wanted from the USA.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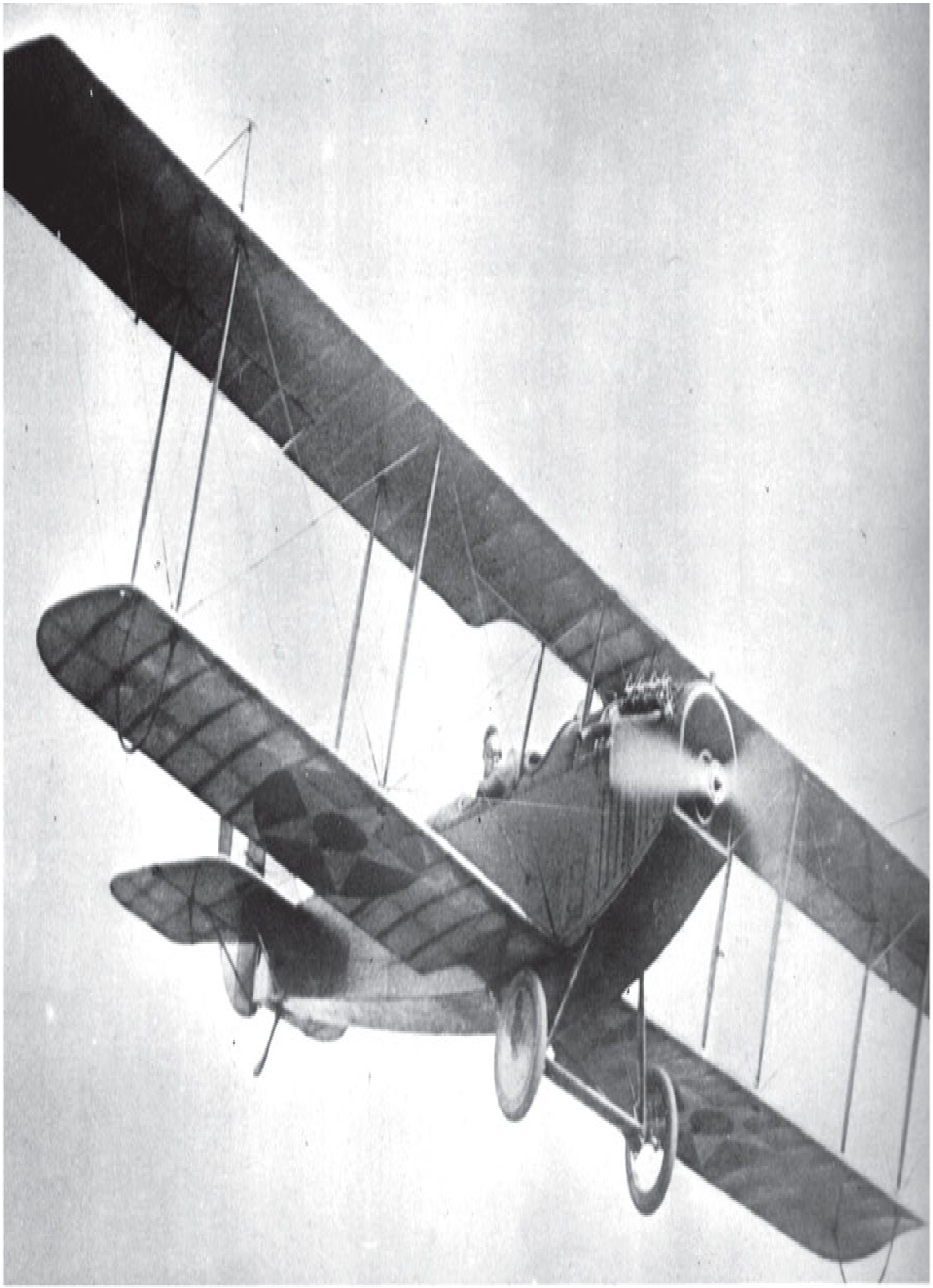
**US cavalry rest along a railway during their advance into northern Mexico as part of the punitive expedition to find Pancho Villa. The expedition turned into an almighty goose chase, with little chance of capturing Villa. Pershing was instructed not to clash with the government troops of President Carranza even when provoked by the Mexican Army. In total, five cavalry regiments went into Mexico, including the 10th Cavalry Regiment, the "Buffalo Soldiers," formed from African-Americans. (Library of Congress)**

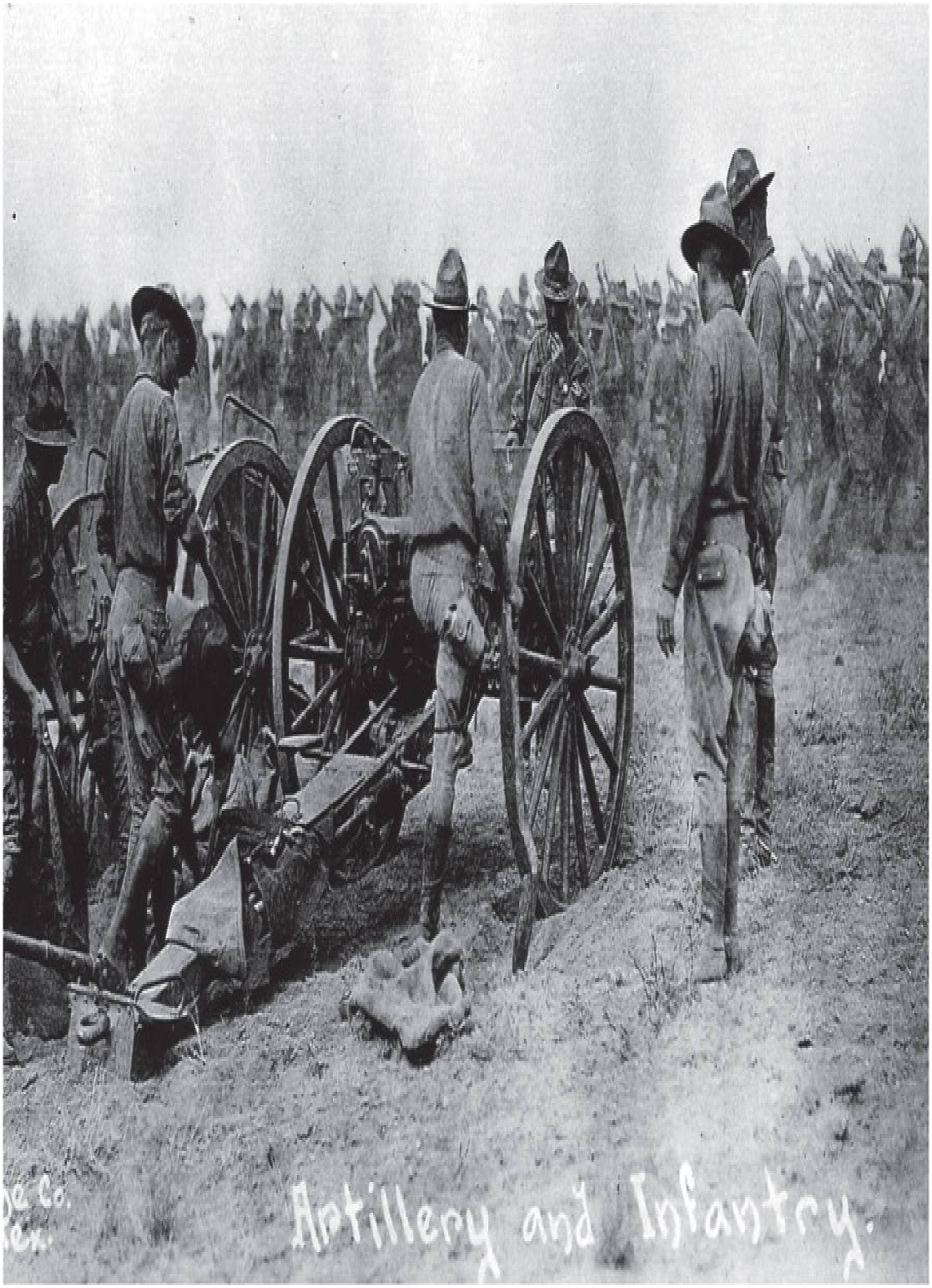
## The US Punitive Expedition 1916–17

President Wilson's reaction to Pancho Villa's outrages was to mobilize 15,000 US National Guardsmen and station them along the long US–Mexican border. He informed President Carranza that he intended to send a punitive expedition into northern Mexico to track down Pancho Villa and his men. Although Carranza was infuriated, his position in Mexico was still fragile and he had little choice but to agree to this violation of Mexican territory. General Pershing was chosen to command the 192 officers and 4,800 other ranks that made up the punitive expedition. There were two brigades of cavalry and one of infantry, with the foot soldiers coming from the 6th and 16th infantry regiments.

The expedition was supported from the air by eight Curtiss JN-2 "Jennys" of the 1st Aero Squadron under the command of Captain Benjamin Fulois. The squadron arrived at Columbus, on the border, on March 15 with ten pilots and 84 ground crew. During the expedition, another six pilots and 38 ground crew arrived to bolster the unit and operate the planes, which were unarmed and only used for reconnaissance missions. The expeditionary corps crossed the border on the 15th and advanced southwards through the state of Chihuahua in two columns, the East and the West. They clashed with small groups of stray Villistas who had failed to get out of the way in time. Pancho Villa himself had got an eight-day start and he and his entourage had taken shelter in the mountains. By April 8, the expeditionary corps had advanced 300 miles into Mexico and had been reinforced to 6,675 men with additional units, including the 17th and 24th infantry regiments. Unfortunately for the US, the whole operation turned into something of a wild goose chase, with most Villista forces having distanced themselves from the US Army’s theater of operations. As the East and West columns advanced in a more or less parallel southern direction, they grew increasingly frustrated at the lack of action. In fact, the only real clash the US troops had with the Villistas was fought by their 10th Cavalry Regiment at Agua Caliente with a few casualties on each side.



**When the US launched their Punitive Expedition into Mexico in 1916, the whole of their aeronautical capacity flew in its support. This is one of eight Curtiss JN-4 unarmed trainers that flew reconnaissance missions for Pershing's troops. One pilot had to crash land during a mission over Northern Mexico and was mobbed by angry civilians who threw rocks at him and his plane. He only survived long enough for Mexican troops to come and save him by posing with the crowd for photographs. As long as they were posing for photographs with him, he knew that they probably would not kill him. (Library of Congress)**



Artillery and Infantry.

**A long column of US troops marches across the north Mexican desert in 1916 as their artillery comrades set up their 76.2mm M1902 field gun. Several of these guns, which were introduced into US service in 1902, were taken by Pershing on his Punitive Expedition into Mexico. Because of the nature of the fighting that the US troops were involved in, these guns were never "fired in anger" during the campaign. The crew are wearing the standard Montana peaked hat with campaign shirt, woolen trousers, and brown cavalry boots. (Library of Congress)**

The Constitutionalist troops of President Carranza provided the main threat to the US forces, with several clashes taking place during the summer. US cavalry patrols were coming under increasing fire from Constitutionalist outposts as the proud Mexicans seethed with anger at the affront to their sovereignty. On June 21, the battle of Carrizal saw the US 10th Cavalry Regiment advance against an encampment of an estimated 10,000 Carranzista troops. Fighting broke out, with the 10th Cavalry Regiment losing two officers and the Mexican commanding officer also killed. In an embarrassing situation, the heavily outnumbered US cavalrymen had 23 of their troopers taken prisoner. The situation was resolved, however, and the expected full-scale Mexican–US war never materialized. Carranza, whose new government was still under threat from his own internal enemies, had to swallow his pride and continue to press the Americans to leave Mexico peacefully. The US forces spent the rest of 1916 encamped and sending out patrols in an increasingly futile search for Villa. By early 1917, the US president had decided that the expedition was a waste of time and recalled his troops. On January 28, 1917, the Punitive Expedition's 10,690 troops began to withdraw from Mexico, its last units crossing the US–Mexican border on February 5. Pershing and his men received a hero's welcome on their return to El Paso but in many Mexicans' eyes Pancho Villa had emerged as the true hero of the whole fiasco.

**This crudely colorized postcard from 1917 shows a machine crew of the US Punitive Expedition into Mexico. They are firing the Hotchkiss M1909 light machine gun, which was the standard type in service with the US Army before their entry into World War I. Although not the best weapon to use in the desert conditions of Mexico it was the only one available in 1916–17. (Author’s Collection)**

## US Foreign Policy Post-World War I

After the participation of the USA in World War I, public opinion began to turn against the continued interventions in Central America and the Caribbean. President Harding, who had succeeded President Wilson in March 1921, had been elected on a ticket that included a reining back of the USA’s intervention policies. This so-called Harding Plan called for a phased withdrawal of US Marines from these countries, especially Haiti and the Dominican Republic. Although the US did end its occupation of the Dominican Republic in 1924, it still had forces in Haiti until 1934. Throughout the 1920s and into the early 1930s, continued interventions in many of the countries in Central America faced internal and external opposition. In 1933 President Roosevelt announced his new “Good Neighbor” policy, which was intended to support friendly rulers like Trujillo. As far as most US politicians were concerned, the governments of Central America and the region should be allowed to rule their countries without interference. The main caveat was that the presidents of these countries should be friendly towards the USA and should not allow their people to disrupt American businesses. If, for instance, the fruit workers or other agricultural workers of US-owned businesses went on strike, their respective presidents were expected to deal with them. Dictators like Trujillo in the Dominican Republic and Somoza in Nicaragua were allowed to do what they wanted with their people within reason. If required to crush a rebellion, the dictators could always claim that the rebels were communists rather than starving peasants. US forces would still intervene, however, when their government thought that leaders in the region were overstepping the mark. This was the case in 1933, when US ships were sent to Cuba in an effort to tone down the brutal policies of its dictator, Gerardo Machado y Morales. US ships remained in the region while the various civil conflicts continued in Cuba (see Chapter 8) and only left once the

USA’s preferred leader, Batista, was in power. The introduction of the Good Neighbor policy was followed by the repeal of the Platt Amendment in 1934. In 1936, the US also relinquished its rights to unilateral intervention in Panama. However, in 1941, when Ricardo Adolfo de la-Guardia deposed President Arias in Panama, he first cleared it with the US Ambassador. US support for pro-American presidents and dictators in the region continues to this day.

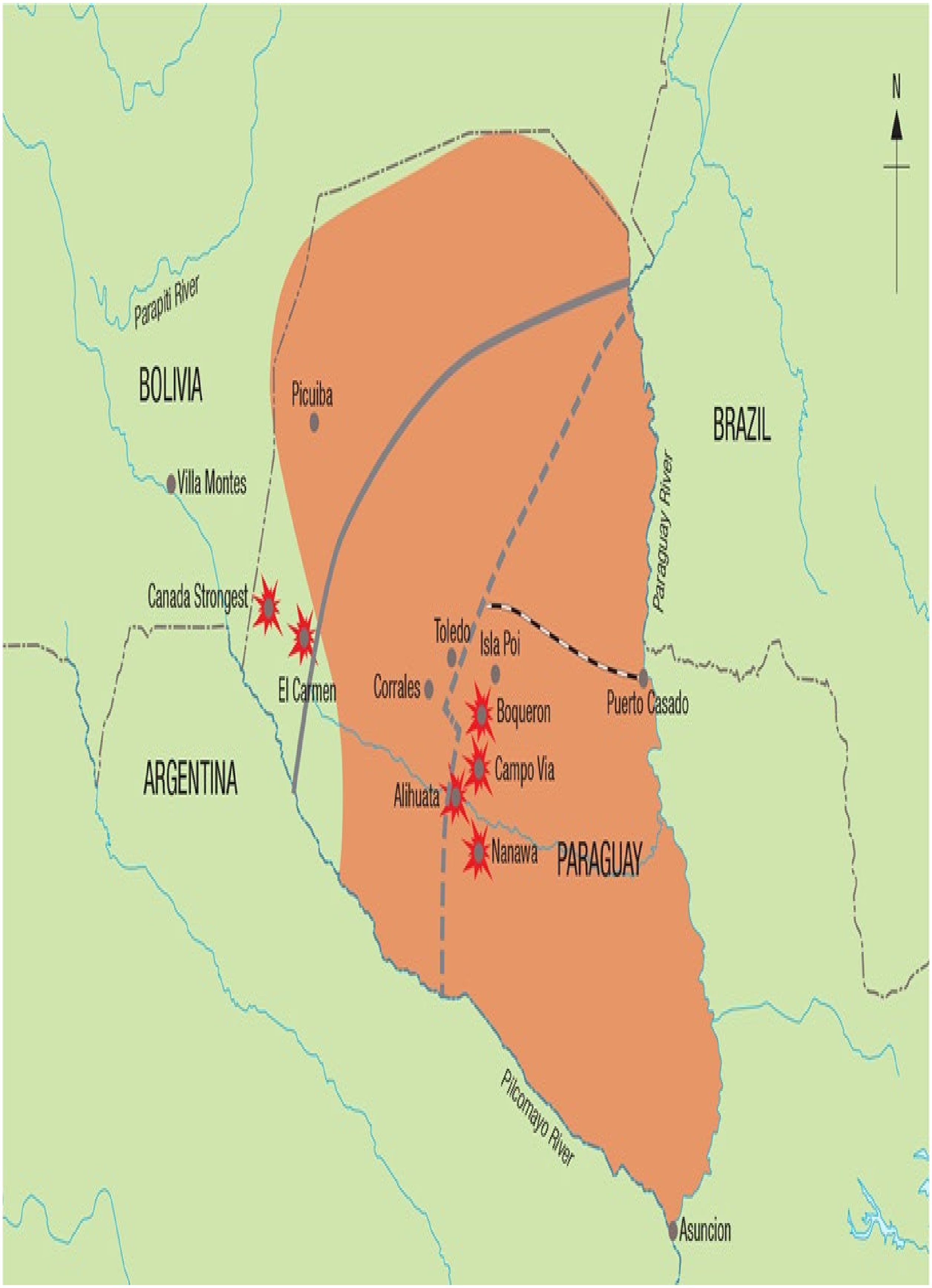
# “I DRINK TO VICTORY!”

**A Paraguayan soldier poses menacingly with his Mauser rifle and his machete, a weapon much feared by his Bolivian foes. Fifty percent of Paraguayan troops were issued with a machete, which was intended only for cutting through the bush and undergrowth. There were many occasions during the Chaco War, however, when they were used as an assault weapon. The soldier's equipment appears to be very basic, with a blanket roll over his shoulder and a canvas bag to carry his personal belongings. (Cody Images)**

## Reasons for the Conflict

"I drink to victory!" were the first words spoken to a gathering of Paraguayan Army officers in July 1932. These words, spoken by General Estigarribia, the Paraguayan commander, were meant to be prophetic, and were to prove to be so within a few months. Between 1932 and 1935, two of the poorest countries in South America fought a war that was essentially a "world war in miniature." Bolivia, with 3,000,000 people, and Paraguay, with a population of just under 1,000,000, were to stretch their meagre resources to the limit in a war over a piece of desert. Bolivia and Paraguay, two landlocked and relatively impoverished nations, in common with a number of Latin American countries, shared a mutually disputed border. Between the two countries was a vast 250,000 square mile arid semi-desert called the Chaco Boreal. Although not a pure desert, the Chaco was a sparsely vegetated and waterless plain with some areas of thorn brush jungle and the odd grassy clearing. Although in Spanish colonial days the whole of the Chaco was legally in Bolivian territory, they had little interest in the region. Few if any Bolivians lived there and the main inhabitants were Guarani Indians, the indigenous people of Paraguay. Paraguayan settlers had also lived in the eastern Chaco for many years and had improved the region, and when the Spanish left in 1810, their government claimed it. Bolivia, while disputing the claim, did little to challenge the assertion until they lost their Pacific coastline to Chile in the disastrous War of the Pacific that ended in 1884. Their only possible route to the sea now lay eastwards, along the Paraguay River, which was navigable to the Atlantic Ocean. Bolivian politicians, and particularly nationalists, now discovered an interest in the Chaco and began lobbying for its recognition as Bolivian by “peaceful” means. After decades of temporary agreements, often brokered by foreign powers and leaders, including Argentina and King Leopold of the Belgians, everything changed in 1928. Oil was discovered in the east of Bolivia on the border with the Chaco and suddenly this vast wasteland took on a new significance. The Bolivians believed that the oilfields must extend eastwards into the Chaco and wanted it for themselves. Both nations now spent the next few years moving steadily into the center of the Chaco and building small forts, fortins, often garrisoned by only a few dozen troops. Logistically it was a nightmare trying to keep these forts supplied, but neither side wanted to give up their claims to the region. Clashes between the garrisons became more frequent and an undeclared state of war soon existed between Bolivia and Paraguay. Four years of skirmishes followed as both nations prepared for full scale war. Another key event in the road to war was the discovery, in March 1930, of Lake Pitiatuta by Paraguayan troops. This unique year-round water source allowed the central region of Chaco to be inhabited and provided the Paraguayan Army with a vital resource if war came. A consequence of this discovery by the Paraguayans was the building of a new fortin, Carlos Antonio Lopez, on the eastern shores of the lake in July 1931. When Bolivian air reconnaissance found the lake and the fortin in April 1932, their troops were ordered to attack it. A Bolivian force attacked the fortin on June 15, 1932, but a Paraguayan force retook it on July 15. Bolivia retaliated by attacking three other fortins during the remainder of July, including the substantial fort at Boqueron. To all intents and purposes, the two nations were now at war and were about to begin a conflict which was to dominate South America for the next three years.

**This well-dressed Bolivian infantryman seen at the start of the Chaco War was most likely from the mountainous regions of his country. He was used to living at high altitudes and he and many of his comrades would find the conditions in the jungles and deserts of the Chaco difficult to cope with. The uniform was really too thick for the daytime conditions in the Chaco Boreal, but better suited to the cold nights in the desert. (Cody Images)**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Parapiti River
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Villa Montes
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Canada Strongest
Toledo
Isla Poi
El Carmen
Corrales
Boqueron
Puerto Casado
Campo Via
ARGENTINA
Alihuata
Nanawa
PARAGUAY
Pilcomayo River
Asuncion

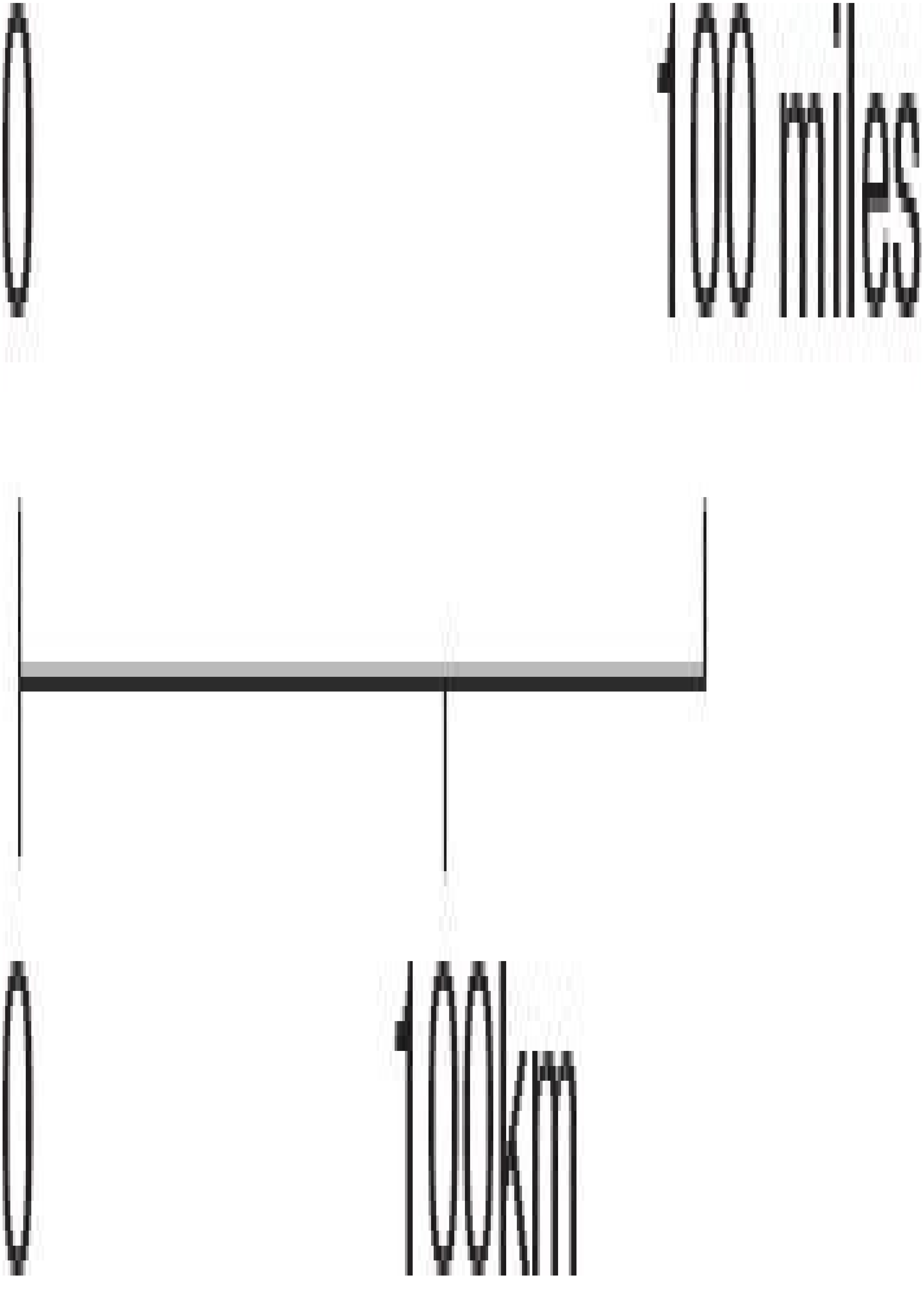
## The Chaco War 1932–35

Disputed Chaco region

Key battles

Front line, September 1932

Front line, April 1934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# The Opposing Armies

The Bolivian Army’s official strength at the outbreak of war was 9,660 men, but in reality, there were only 6,400 troops ready to fight. During the war the Bolivians, with their larger population, were able to mobilize 250,000 men – or one in 12 of its people. At the start of the conflict there were six divisions, with 13 infantry regiments, four cavalry regiments, four artillery regiments, and four engineer regiments, organised as follows: 1st Division, three infantry regiments, one cavalry regiment, two artillery regiments; 2nd Division, one infantry regiment, one cavalry regiment, one artillery regiment, one engineer regiment; 3rd Division, two infantry regiments, one cavalry regiment, one artillery regiment, one engineer regiment; 4th Division, three infantry regiments, one cavalry regiment; 5th Division, two infantry regiments, one engineer regiment; 6th Division, two infantry regiments, one engineer regiment.

**Paraguayan soldiers use a captured Bolivian SEMAG 20mm anti-aircraft gun in their defensive positions. Several of these guns were captured during the early fighting in the Chaco along with large amounts of ammunition. The poorly equipped Paraguayans utilized any captured weaponry, especially heavier weapons like this gun. During the war the Paraguayans captured seven of this type of gun, giving their army adequate anti-aircraft protection. (Author's Collection)**

**A battery of French Schneider M1927 75mm howitzers of the Paraguayan Army prepares to fire towards Bolivian lines. These guns were relatively easy to manhandle, which was useful when few draught animals were available. The gun crew has eight men and between them they would be able to move their howitzer to a new position when necessary. In total, the Paraguayans had 24 of this model of gun and it was the most numerous type in service. (Cody Images)**

The Bolivians had bought a lot of weaponry in the years leading up to the outbreak of war, including a large order from the Vickers company of Great Britain. They had bought 39,000 modern rifles, nearly all vz. 24s, the Czechoslovakian version of the Mauser. A large number of 9mm submachine guns were purchased by the Bolivians, including Bergmann MP 28s, Steyr-Solothurn S1-100s, and Vollmer VMP30s. Their 750 machine guns were predominantly two models, the Czech ZB-30 light machine gun and the British Vickers Mark I heavy machine gun. Mortars were not purchased before the war but their effectiveness in Paraguayan hands saw the Bolivians buying some later. Bolivia had gone to pains to make sure its army had enough artillery and at the start of the war there were 30 65mm infantry guns, 70 75mm field guns, 47 75mm mountain guns, and 20 105mm field guns. Bolivia’s anti-aircraft guns were of two types, the Oerlikon MKI twin-20mm, of which they had 16, and the SEMAG 20mm gun, of which they had eight. The SEMAG could be used in the anti-tank role but as the Paraguayans had no tanks or armored cars this was immaterial. Bolivia had also bought a handful of light tanks from Vickers, with two different versions of the latest 6-ton light tank and some Cardon-Lloyd tankettes. They had two Type B 6-tonners, with twin turrets armed with Vickers machine guns, and a single Type A, with a large turret with a 47mm gun. The two-man tankettes were open topped, with a Vickers machine gun mounted on the right of the tank. These armored vehicles were really an extravagance for the Bolivian Army, as there were not enough of them to make a difference during the war. They were only used, inconclusively, on three occasions, all during the fighting in July, August, and November of 1933. Other extravagant weaponry bought by the Bolivians included a few Oerlikon SSG36 anti-tank rifles and six flamethrowers. The Bolivian Army had a number of weaknesses, especially when it came to its higher-ranking officers. Their high command was often in chaos during the Chaco War, with “political” generals falling out amongst themselves and with their president, Daniel Salamanca. Salamanca interfered on many occasions during the war and championed the appointment of German General Hans Kundt to take command in December 1932. Salamanca had a low opinion of his Bolivian generals and said that his overthrow in November 1934 by the military was the only “maneuver in which they had been successful.”

By the end of the war Paraguay would have mobilized a staggering 140,000 men, or one in seven of its population. In July 1932 at the start of the war, Paraguay had six infantry regiments, five cavalry regiments, three groups of artillery, and an incomplete engineer battalion. The bulk of the army was concentrated in the 1st Division but the army was soon expanded to 24,000 men in two divisions.

**In the center of the picture is General Hans Kundt, the German officer who was brought in by the Bolivian Government to organize their army in 1921. It was expected that his experience in World War I would be enough to win the war against Paraguay. Kundt proved inflexible and wasted many Bolivian lives in frontal assaults on dug-in Paraguayan positions. He was dismissed in early 1933 and replaced by Brigadier-General Penaranda, a Bolivian officer who was cheaper to pay and just as capable. Some say, however, that General Kundt was a convenient scapegoat to blame for the general failure of the Bolivian Army in the Chaco War. (Cody Images)**

Paraguay, with a much smaller budget than Bolivia, had bought only the bare necessities of war, with a variety of Mauser 7.65mm model rifles being purchased over the years from Germany, Belgium, and Spain. They had a few Thompson sub-machine guns but there is no photographic evidence of them being used in the Chaco. Paraguay captured 935 submachine guns from the Bolivian Army during the war and put them to good use. Their standard light machine gun was the excellent Danish Madsen and they had some Vickers, Browning, and a few elderly Maxim heavy machine guns. Some of the Maxims were reported to misfire after firing a few rounds and were replaced as soon as was feasible. One weapon they did have that gave them an advantage during the early fighting was 24 Brandt 81mm mortars, which were ideal in the close fighting in the Chaco. Three mortars could be bought for the price of an artillery piece, and the Brandts that the Paraguayans bought turned out to be one of their best purchases. The Paraguayans had an inferiority in artillery, with 37 75mm mountain guns and only eight 105mm field guns. The 75mms were a mix of Vickers, Krupp, and Schneider, while the 105mms were also from the French manufacturer. One weapon that the Paraguayan budget could not stretch to was anti-aircraft guns, but they were lucky to capture some from the Bolivians in the early months of the war. The decisive advantage that the Paraguayans did have was in their commander-in-chief, General Jose Felix Estigarribia, a veteran of the civil war in 1922. He was a “man of austere habits, who did not drink during the war and smoked only one cigarette per day.” Estigarribia realized that the war would be a war of logistics. It would not be a matter of the number of troops that could be put into the field so much as the number of men who could be put into the field and then fed, watered, and supplied. He also had the total support of President Eusebio Ayala, and the two formed a strong partnership during the three year conflict.

## The Paraguayan Navy

One major advantage that the Paraguayans had over the Bolivians was their navy and mercantile marine. Their boats allowed the Paraguayan Army a secure supply route from the capital Asuncion to the Chaco. Ships could travel up the Paraguay River from the capital Asuncion to Puerto Casado, situated on the eastern edge of the Chaco. From Puerto Casado a small railway allowed supplies to be moved almost to the center of the Chaco. The navy had two Italian-built gunboats, the Paraguay and the Humaita, which had been built in 1931. One of the big gunboats alone could transport 1,000 troops at a time and they were constantly ferrying back and forth during the war. In addition, they had two older gunboats, four patrol boats, two tugs, and some locally made small river boats. The navy commandeered the whole of the Paraguayan Mercantile Marine at the start of the war, which was made up of a passenger ship, eight freighters, 24 barges, 22 tugs, and many small river boats. This combined naval and mercantile marine force meant that large numbers of troops could be transported to the front at short notice. The Bolivians did not have an equivalent route into the Chaco and had to rely on the poor road system and their trucks to move supplies along long and fragile supply routes.

## Foreign Advisors and Volunteers

Both combatants in the Chaco War began the conflict with relatively small armies, and when these expanded, they were desperately short of suitably trained officers. The solution was to recruit foreign military advisors to fill out the officer ranks until enough “home grown” candidates could be trained. Bolivia’s reliance on foreign officers was not helped by the fact that university graduates and students were sent to serve in the ranks rather than being sent for junior officer training. In contrast the Paraguayans sent the vast majority of their students to officer training school. Germans played a major role in the Bolivian Army, especially before December 1933, when General Hans Kundt was in command. Kundt, a veteran of the Eastern Front in World War I, had served in the Bolivian Army in the 1920s and returned before the outbreak of the Chaco War. Other well-known German officers in the Bolivian Army included Ernst Röhm – the future leader of the Nazi's SA Brownshirt militia – and Wilhelm Brandt, a German military engineer with a keen interest in the theory of armored warfare. He commanded the small Bolivian tank force before its five vehicles were either destroyed or captured. In later years he was responsible for the design of camouflage clothing worn by the Waffen-SS between 1939 and 1945. Another German armored commander was Achim von Kries, who commanded one of the Bolivian tanks and was wounded at the battle of Nanawa.

**The crew of a Bolivian Vickers 105mm MKB howitzer prepare to fire their gun for their new commander-in-chief, General Enrique Penaranda. This was the largest field gun in service with the Bolivians and had been purchased along with tanks and small arms from the British armaments firm in the early 1930s. At the start of the war they had eight in service, with two falling into Paraguayan hands during the fighting. (Author's Collection)**

Bolivia had also had a small Czechoslovakian military mission, which was sent to advise their commanders after their defeat at Camp Via in 1933. Bolivia also had 107 Chilean military and police officers fighting for them, who had enlisted as private citizens. They were mostly motivated by the economic and political situation in Chile at the time, with some being out of favor following the upheavals of 1932 (see Chapter 8). It was suspected that the Chilean president unofficially supported sending officers to the Chaco, despite it being officially illegal for them to serve there after 1934. The Chilean Army had gained a good reputation in the 1920s and 1930s for its professionalism and its officers and former officers were in high demand. They were reported to have had a far better relationship with the Bolivian soldiers under their command than the native officers did. As well as treating their men well, they usually stayed in the front line rather than moving to the rear when fighting began. A shortage of available Chileans, however, led to the recruitment of some Peruvian officers and several redundant Mexican generals to serve in the Bolivian Army. Paraguay had fewer foreign officers, with around 80 White Russian officers in their army during the war, including two former Czarist generals, Nikolai Ern and Ivan Belaieff. Exiled White Russians had turned up in many armies after fleeing the Soviet Union in the 1920s. The Paraguayans were also served secretly by Argentine military intelligence, which sent reports of movements of Bolivian troops near their border during the war. Some private Argentinian citizens, looking for adventure, served in the Paraguayan 7th Cavalry Regiment as infantry.

**The pilot of a Bolivian Curtiss Hawk II fighter warms up his engine while a member of the ground crew makes a few last adjustments. This kind of last-minute maintenance was extremely hazardous to the mechanic but was sometimes essential for a fast turnaround during air operations. The pilot is about to go on another bombing raid against Paraguayan forces besieging the Bolivian positions at Villa Montes. The Hawk II could carry four bombs in its main role as a ground-attack plane during the Chaco War. (Library of Congress)**

# The War in the Air

Bolivia began the war with a distinct advantage in the air, with a quite substantial 88-plane air force, Cuerpo de Aviacion, for the size of the country. The Bolivian Air Force had a modern fighter force of ten US-made Curtiss Hawk IIs and six British Vickers Type 143 Scout planes, as well as 53 light bomber/reconnaissance planes of various makes and 16 trainers. The bombers included modern US aircraft, including 20 Curtiss Ospreys and nine Curtiss Falcons, as well as six Dutch Fokker CVbs and three French Breguet 19s. Its transport fleet was impressive, with three types of German Junkers transports, eight F 13s, and three W 34 light transport planes, and four ex-Bolivian airline Junkers Ju 52/3M heavy transports. The only non-German transport was a US Ford Trimotor, which had been donated to the war effort by the richest man in Bolivia. Because of the logistical difficulties in getting supplies to the army, the transport fleet was vital to Bolivia’s war effort.

The mainstay of the much smaller Paraguayan Air Force, the Fuerzas Aereas Nacionales, were the 15 French Potez 25 light bombers, vital to their air campaign. By the end of the war the Potez 25 fleet had been reduced to a single aircraft, but they had done their job manfully. Paraguay’s fighter force was much weaker than the Bolivians, with only seven French made Wibault CL-73 fighters at the start of the war. The Wibault was a cheap fighter to buy but it had one major weakness, and that was that its engine was water cooled. This type of engine cooling system was not practical in the sweltering heat of the Chaco, and it performed badly. In 1933, the outnumbered and underperforming Wilbaults were reinforced by five more suitable Italian Fiat CR.20bis fighters. Three of the Wibaults were lost during the war and the remaining four were withdrawn from the front line in 1933. This left just the Fiats to perform escort and air-defense duties, and by 1935, there were only two of the Italian fighters left. Paraguay’s transport fleet was rather small, with only six aircraft of various makes, and all were light transports, apart from a medium type, the Italian Breda 44. During the Chaco War, there were few aerial encounters, as the pilots had problems finding each other in the vastness over which they were flying. One aerial battle, however, ended with the downing of a Paraguayan Wibault fighter by a Vickers Type 143 fighter of the Bolivian Air Force. With so few dogfights, it is surprising that the Bolivians did manage to have one air ace, Major Rafael Pavon, who was crediting with shooting down three Paraguayan planes. A shortage of trained pilots also hampered the air war, so several foreigners were hired. These included three Uruguayans, one serving in the Bolivian Air Force and two in the Paraguayan Air Force. The two pilots in the Paraguayan Air Force were reported to have undertaken some of the most daring missions of the war.

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**Paraguayan pilots pose in front of one of the last French-made Wibault 73C-1 fighters in service with their air force. The ungainly Wilbault had been in service with the Paraguayans since the 1920s and was largely obsolete by the early 1930s. In the first years of the Chaco War the Paraguayans had no choice but to rely on the Wibault, which formed the backbone of their fighter force. When five of the more agile Italian Fiat 20bis fighters arrived in 1933, any remaining French fighters were used for second-line duties. (Leigh Wade Collection, US Air Force Archives)**

## The Siege of Borquerin

The former Paraguayan fortin of Borquerin had been occupied by a Bolivian force of 711 officers and men, known as the “Marzana Detachment,” in July 1932. Its defenders were armed with 13 heavy and 27 light machine guns, two 75mm field guns, and a 75mm mountain gun, as well as two SEMAG 20mm anti-aircraft guns. Paraguay was determined to recapture the fortin and sent their 1st and 2nd infantry divisions, totaling 10,000 men, to lay siege to it. On September 9, they began a series of costly frontal attacks against the well-dug-in Bolivians, suffering heavy losses. The Bolivians attempted to reinforce the fortin, and a limited number of troops did manage to break through the Paraguayan blockade. The costly frontal assaults were called off and the Paraguayans settled in for a long siege, ready to starve the enemy out. Much of the available Paraguayan artillery was moved up to Borquerin and began to bombard the defenses. It was hoped that the 16 75mms, eight 105mm guns and 11 81mm mortars would destroy the Bolivian machine gun posts that had devastated the Paraguayan attacks. The Paraguayan artillery crews, however, lacked the field radios and other communications equipment to properly coordinate their bombardment of the defenses. By the end of September, however, the Bolivians were running out of food and, more importantly, water. Attempts to drop supplies to the defenders by air failed and a 3,000-man relief force under Colonel Enrique Penaranda had been thrown back. On the 29th, Lieutenant-Colonel Manuel Marzana and his 820-strong garrison surrendered with only 240 being deemed able bodied. For the Paraguayans the military equipment they captured was a major boost to their war effort, with 911 rifles, 58 machine guns, and five pieces of artillery falling into their hands. The Bolivian artillerymen had failed to spike their guns for some reason, and their guns and shells were captured intact. In addition, the two light anti-aircraft guns gave them their first weapons of this kind for their arsenal. The fighting around Borquerin had cost the Bolivians 2,000 men, which was 50 percent of their available forces in the Chaco at the time. Colonel Penaranda’s failed relief force now fell apart as it tried to reach its base at Ballivan and 1,000 of his men deserted. Bolivian forces in the Chaco were now in total disarray and the Bolivian chief of staff paid the price for the debacle and was dismissed. In his place, President Salamanca recalled the German officer General Kundt from exile to try and bring some order to the situation. On December 6, Kundt assumed command of the Bolivian Army and began to rebuild it almost from scratch. Kundt received reinforcements from the rear areas and prepared to launch an offensive against the Paraguayans.

**Paraguayan soldiers guard four blindfolded Bolivian prisoners who are to be taken back to their headquarters for questioning. During the Chaco War, the ordinary soldier in both armies would have known little about what was going on outside his small unit. They would advance against the enemy bravely when ordered to and defend their position stoically when ordered to. These men are lucky to be given a ride in one of the few trucks in service with the Paraguayan Army – most prisoners would have to march miles through the heat. By the end of the war the Paraguayans had 30,000 Bolivian prisoners in camps, who all needed feeding and watering. (Cody Images)**

**A Bolivian soldier struggles to get through the thorn bushes that formed much of the undergrowth in the Chaco Boreal. Although both armies had established small forts in the Chaco in the 1920s, the Bolivian Army was less accustomed to the desert conditions. Most of the Bolivian soldiers were Indians from the highlands and found the sub-tropical weather in the lowlands of the Chaco difficult to deal with. The thick temperate uniforms that the Bolivian soldier was issued with in the early months of the war were also found to be too heavy for fighting in the desert. (Author's Collection)**

**Bolivian machine gunners practice firing their Vickers Mark I heavy machine gun wearing gas masks. Neither side had chemical weapons, and the wearing of these masks in the heat of the Chaco desert must have been unbearable as well as pointless. The Vickers was part of the large arms shipments acquired by Bolivia before the war, which included several tanks and artillery pieces. (Cody Images)**

## The War: October 1932–January 1933

The fighting in the autumn of 1932 and early 1933 involved the Bolivian and Paraguayan armies attacking some of each other’s smaller fortins. In October the Paraguayans recaptured their fortins at Arce and Alihuata, and by the end of the month, the Bolivians had fallen back on a defense line in the south-western Chaco along the Argentinean border. In early December the Bolivians managed to stop the Paraguayan advance and then counterattacked, re-taking four fortins: Platanillos, Bolivar, Corrales, and Loa. On December 20, 1932, the German mercenary General Hans Kundt was given command of the Bolivian Army and prepared a new offensive. In anticipation the Paraguayan built up their defenses at their fortin at Nanawa, its intended target.

## The “Verdun of South America” – Nanawa 1933

On January 20, 1933, General Kundt took personal command of 6,000 troops in nine regiments supported by 12 75mm field guns and launched them against the Paraguayan fortin at Nanawa. He had air support from nine aircraft, which faced little opposition from the Paraguayan Air Force. Three costly frontal assaults failed and Kundt decided to build a fortified 12-mile perimeter around the fortin. Further attacks on the fortin’s defenses followed as the Bolivians tried to cut

Nanawa off from the rear. Eventually the Bolivian attack managed to enter some of the outer trenches of the fortin, but heavy rain forced them to abandon the assault. With ammunition inside the fortin running out, a daring aerial supply drop by four aircraft was attempted by the Paraguayans. Sixteen boxes of cartridges were dropped, but at the cost of three of the four planes severely damaged. The Bolivians were licking their wounds after suffering 2,000 casualties in the increasingly futile frontal assaults by the end of January. The defenders had lost 248 dead in their defense, but had succeeded in holding off a vastly superior force and in severely damaging Kundt’s reputation. Nanawa’s defenders had created a legend by their defense of the fortin, which some romantic commentators nicknamed the “Verdun of South America.”

## February–June 1933

Between February and June 1933, the Bolivians concentrated their efforts in attacking three Paraguayan fortins: Toledo, Corrales, and Alihuata. Their first targets were the fortins at Corrales and Toledo, which were attacked by most of the available 3,600 Bolivian force in late February. The fortins, whose defenses had been well designed by White Russian engineers, held despite repeated assaults by the Bolivians. Attention turned to the fortin at Alihuata, which managed to hold out for a few days but was abandoned on March 12. Alihuata’s loss exposed the Paraguayan 1st Division, which now withdrew, taking with them all their equipment, including their field guns. These had to be carried through the jungle by teams of 20 men each in a mammoth effort. Rains now affected the operations of both armies during February and March and disease, especially malaria, was causing problems. Although another offensive began in May, the morale of many Bolivian units was at an all-time low. Desertions and mutinies became commonplace and many soldiers were shot in an attempt to instill discipline in the ranks. On May 10, a Bolivian attack with 2,000 on the Paraguayan fortin Herrera, defended by 1,200 Paraguayans, failed. Bolivian casualties during the assault were very heavy, with 556 dead and 314 wounded.

# Nanawa Again

Despite the setbacks during the first six months of 1933, General Kundt was determined to turn the tables on the Paraguayans. In July he launched another massive attack on Nanawa again, with the first assaults going in on the 4th. A huge mine had been exploded under the Paraguayan defenses at 9.00am but had failed to kill many of the defenders as they had withdrawn a few hundred yards before it went off. For the rest of the morning the Bolivians fired 4,800 shells from their 22 field guns and 12 mortars, while above 12 aircraft bombed and strafed the defenders. Kundt then sent all 9,000 of his men in a frontal assault on the Nanawa, trenches with flamethrowers and five light tanks in support. The tanks proved ineffective, with one being put out of action, and the attackers lost hundreds of men in their costly charges against the machine guns of the defenders. On the 9th, the Paraguayans counterattacked the Bolivians trenches with a similar loss of life and the fighting ended with a stalemate. This latest attempt to take the fortin had cost the Bolivians 1,600 casualties and the Paraguayans 500 out of their 9,000-strong garrison.

**The Bolivian crew of a Vickers 65mm Mk E infantry gun fire towards Paraguayan positions from their entrenchments. This gun was easily broken down into several components and was ideal for the kind of war being fought in the Chaco in the 1930s. In total the Bolivian Army spent over $3,000,000 on armaments from Vickers, including tanks, artillery, and machine guns. Included in this 1926 order were 750 machine guns, 196 pieces of artillery, and 15 aircraft of various types. (Photo by Kurt Severin/ullstein bild via Getty Images)**

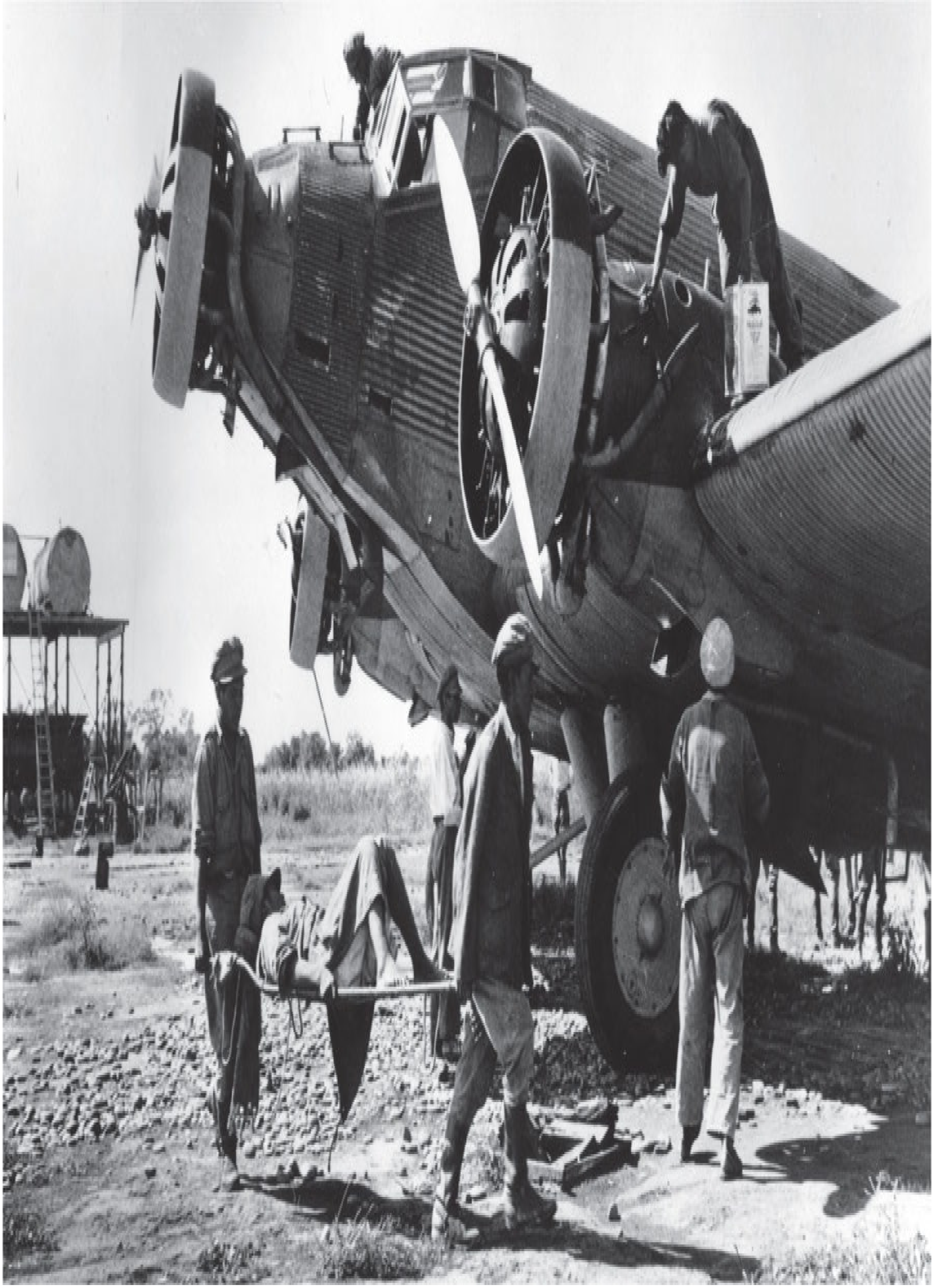
**A Bolivian British-made Cardon-Lloyd MK VIB tankette moves through the bush ready to attack the Paraguayan positions in 1933. This vehicle was one of a pair bought by the Bolivians before the war along with three Vickers 6-ton light tanks, which was a more formidable vehicle. Two of the three Vickers had two turrets armed with machine guns, while the other had a single turret with a 37mm gun. Originally there were supposed to be 12 armored vehicles bought by Bolivia in the early 1930s, but the order was reduced to five due to financial constraints. One of the crewmen is the German mercenary Wilhelm Brandt, who commanded the small Bolivian armored force. In the 100-degrees heat in the shade of the Chaco, these tanks had to operate with all their hatches open. This made them easy prey for a brave Paraguayan soldier to lob a grenade into at close quarters. (Cody Images)**

## The Second Paraguayan Offensive

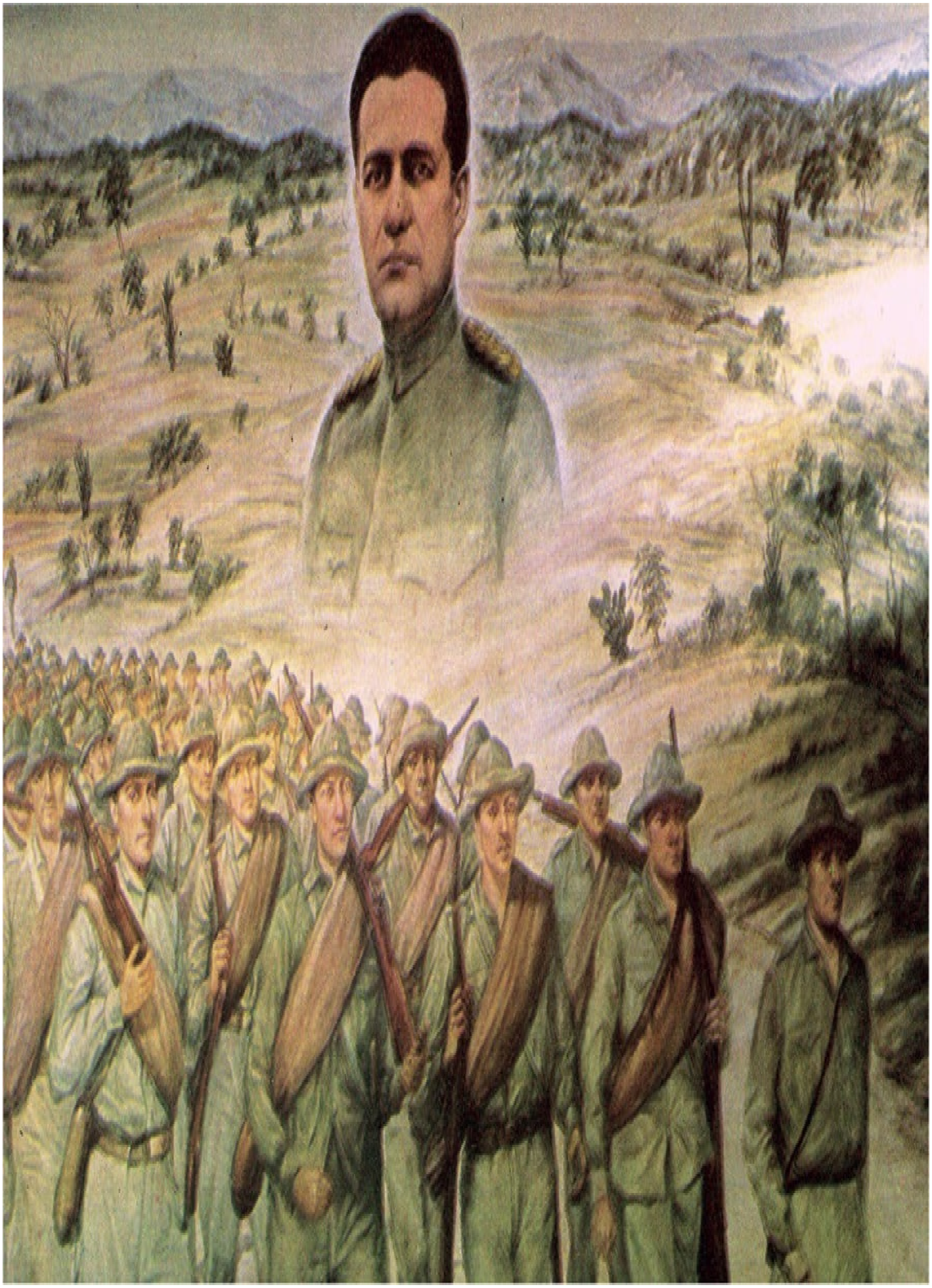
In October 1933, the Paraguayans went onto the offensive with 26,500 troops under the command of Brigadier-General Estigarribia. For several months they had been stockpiling shells and other munitions and their engineers had dug 22 new wells to provide their troops with water. They attacked along a 55-mile front and sent the Bolivians into panic, as many of their troops were on leave and Kundt was away in the capital, La Paz, asking for reinforcements. When the extent of the offensive became apparent, Kundt rushed back to the Chaco and tried to stabilize the Bolivian defenses. His efforts were hampered by the fact that the Paraguayans had tapped into the enemy’s phone lines. Estigarribia had also set up an efficient intelligence network that allowed him to counter every move that Kundt made. By mid-October 1933 the remnants of the Bolivian 4th and 9th divisions were surrounded at the fortin at Campo Via. The Paraguayans settled down for a long siege and the Bolivians began to run out of food and other supplies. On December 12, Campo Via surrendered and its 8,000-strong garrison went into captivity. This Paraguayan victory secured them a great deal of war booty, including 8,000 vz. 24 rifles, 25 Stokes-Brandt mortars, and approximately 536 machine guns, as well as Solothurn 15mm anti-tank rifles. For the Paraguayans, however, the victory was a Pyrrhic one, with their losses amounting to nearly 8,000 men. Many of their casualties resulted from untreated wounds, or sickness caused largely by hunger.

## The December 1933 Truce

By December 1933, both sides were exhausted and seemed open to offers of mediation by the League of Nations and a number of “neutral” South American nations. These various parties managed to organize a temporary cessation of hostilities. The truce was arranged to begin on December 9, but just before it came into force, the Paraguayan Army took the Bolivian forward HQ at Munoz. It was now time for both armies to take stock and the Bolivians in particular could reflect on the cost of the war over the last 18 months. They had suffered crippling losses in equipment and weaponry, with 12,000 rifles, 800 machine guns and sub-machine guns, 25 mortars, and 20 pieces of artillery being lost. Bolivia had also lost 30 valuable aircraft, mainly through wear and tear and poor maintenance in the heat of the Chaco. New weaponry and equipment were ordered from the already depleted Bolivian treasury, including over 100 new artillery pieces in 65, 75, and 105mm. A total of 60,000 modern Mauser rifles and 1,000 Czech machine guns were also bought, along with more mortars. Most importantly, 30 new aircraft were bought, making up for those lost in the first stage of the war. On the other side, the Paraguayans had been able to use the weaponry they had captured in their victories to replace old rifles and machine guns for their 22,000 men in the front line. Bolivia had sent 77,000 troops to the Chaco in the first 18 months of the war but after a series of defeats they were down to only 7,000 in the front line. A further 8,000 men were tied up in protecting supply lines or were held in the rear ready for the resumption of the fighting.



**Wounded Bolivian soldiers are loaded onto a German Junkers Ju 52/3M transport to be taken back to a hospital in the rear. The Bolivian Air Force had four of these transport planes, which had been seconded from the national airline at the start of the war. Compared to the mix of smaller transport planes that the Paraguayans had, these planes gave the Bolivians a great advantage during the war. The Junkers were also used to transport troops and even artillery to the front line, alongside a single Ford Trimotor, which crashed after a month of service. (Library of Congress)**



**This idealized portrait of the Paraguayan Army marching to war has the image of their military leader Marshal Estigarribia looking over them. He had proved himself an exceptional commander during civil conflicts in Paraguay in the 1920s. Without him in command the outnumbered and outgunned Paraguayans would have struggled to survive against the Bolivians. After the fall of President Ayala in 1936 he went into exile, but in 1939 was elected president. A cult of personality grew up around Estigarribia as the savior of Paraguay, which was reinforced by his death in a plane crash in September 1940. (Photo by SeM/UIG via Getty Images)**

## January–June 1934

The truce ended on January 7, and immediately the Paraguayans began an offensive that ended with the defeat of the Bolivians at Tarija in the mid-western Chaco in March. The battle for the fortin at Tarija lasted from March 22 to 27 and resulted in the destruction of the Bolivian 18th Division and the capture of 900 men. A few months later, in late May, the Bolivians achieved their greatest victory when they captured the Paraguayan fortin Canada Esperanza. The 1,556-strong garrison was forced to surrender and its defenders were taken into Bolivian captivity. This victory was not exploited, however, as the Bolivians had too many of their 35,000 troops tied up in defending fortins. Because so many Bolivians soldiers were protecting the fortins, there were not enough men available to exploit their numerical superiority over the 21,000 Paraguayans.

## The Attack on Ballivan

In June 1934 the Paraguayans began a new offensive, aimed at the Bolivian HQ at Ballivan. Ballivan was of no real strategic value, but it symbolized the

Bolivians’ control of the southern Chaco. The Paraguayans began their first attack on the 18th and the Bolivian commander-in-chief General Penaranda (Kundt having been dismissed on December 12, 1933) ordered Ballivan’s commander, Colonel David Toro, to evacuate the fortin. Being a proud Bolivian, Toro refused to obey his superior’s order and held Ballivan with his 16,000 troops. Paraguayan attacks continued throughout the rest of June and into July but they did not have the strength to capture the fortin. The siege turned into a stalemate with neither side having the ability to overcome the other and the two-month battle became known as “La batalla de los millimetres.” The fighting between January and July 1934 had cost the Paraguayans 5,000 men, while the Bolivians had lost a thousand less.

**A Paraguayan Regiment is preparing to leave for the front line in the Chaco Boreal from their assembly area in July 1934. All the trucks which are going to transport them appear to be the Ford AA which was the most common type in service with the Paraguayan Army. The key to victory for either side in the Chaco War was to keep the troops who were fighting in the inhospitable desert supplied with all the essentials, especially water. (Author's Collection)**

## El Carmen and Yrendague

Regardless of their losses the Paraguayans took the initiative and went over to the offensive on August 14, with their 6th Division moving towards the fortin at Yrendague. Bolivian forces were rushed from Ballivan by Colonel Toro to help surround the 6th Division on September 8. Paraguayan troops now had to break out of an encirclement, leaving behind their heavy weapons and equipment. Much of the Paraguayan equipment was former Bolivian artillery and machine guns captured in earlier battles. The booty included 14 trucks, eight artillery pieces, 14 coveted mortars, and large numbers of machine guns. Despite this setback, General Estigarribia decided to turn defeat into victory by surrounding the large number of victorious Bolivian troops in a huge trap at El Carmen. Although the first attempt at encircling the Bolivians failed, a second offensive on November 15 succeeded in trapping about 7,000 in an area totally lacking in water. In total 2,500 Bolivians died, and another 4,000 surrendered to the Paraguayans on the 16th, while Ballivan fell on November 18. The disaster at El Carmen and the fall of the important fortin Fort Ballivan now led to the overthrow of President Salamanca, who was arrested when he arrived at the Chaco HQ at Villa Montes on November 26.

The Paraguayan victory at El Carmen was soon followed up by a speedy offensive northward to the fortin at Yrengdague by the II Corps in early December. Waiting for them there were the Bolivian forces but they were surprised by the arrival of the 8th Paraguayan Division. The 8th, under the command of Colonel Eugenio Gara, had cut through 40 miles of thorn brush with their machetes to get to Yrengdague. They were joined by the main Paraguayan force and the Bolivians were caught in a classic pincer movement on December 10. Bolivian casualties in this surprise attack were estimated at 3,000 men, while their comrades retreated to a new defensive line at Ybybobo on the Pilcomayo River. This defense line was overrun by the pursuing Paraguayans and the Bolivians were trapped with their backs to the river. During this action the Paraguayans suffered a total of 46 casualties, while hundreds of Bolivians died, including 200 who drowned in the waters of the flooded river. A total of 1,200 Bolivians were captured. This defeat pushed the Bolivians to the western borders of the Chaco and the Bolivian territory in the foothills of the Andes.

## Villa Montes

After the defeats of 1934, the Bolivian Army in the Chaco was reorganized again, this time to a strength of 50,000 men. It was a credit to Bolivian determination that they were able to rebuild their army in the Chaco yet again although it was made up mostly of raw recruits. The Bolivians also built a new defensive line centered on the heavily fortified fortin at Villa Montes on the western border of the Chaco. This new bulwark was manned by 25,000 troops with 100 artillery pieces and protected from Paraguayan air attack by numerous 20mm anti-aircraft guns. The Bolivian air force stationed at the nearby airfield flew constant missions to bomb and strafe any enemy formations in the area. This time the Bolivians were defending their own territory, and a defeat would allow the Paraguayans to advance into Bolivia proper. Paraguay had only 15,000 troops in the Chaco by early 1935, and the units advancing towards Villa Montes were largely made up of youths, old men, and previously rejected recruits. Paraguay had also spent the last of its foreign reserves, and there was a shortage of shells for their 24 artillery pieces and 19 mortars. They had to resort to “tooling” down surplus 76.2mm shells to fit their 75mm guns, with the 1st Army Corps firing its last shells on March 8. Paraguay’s advance into Bolivian territory had also created the problem of supplying their men along longer and longer supply lines. Trucks were quickly wearing out after several years in the hostile environment of the Chaco and there was no money to replace them.

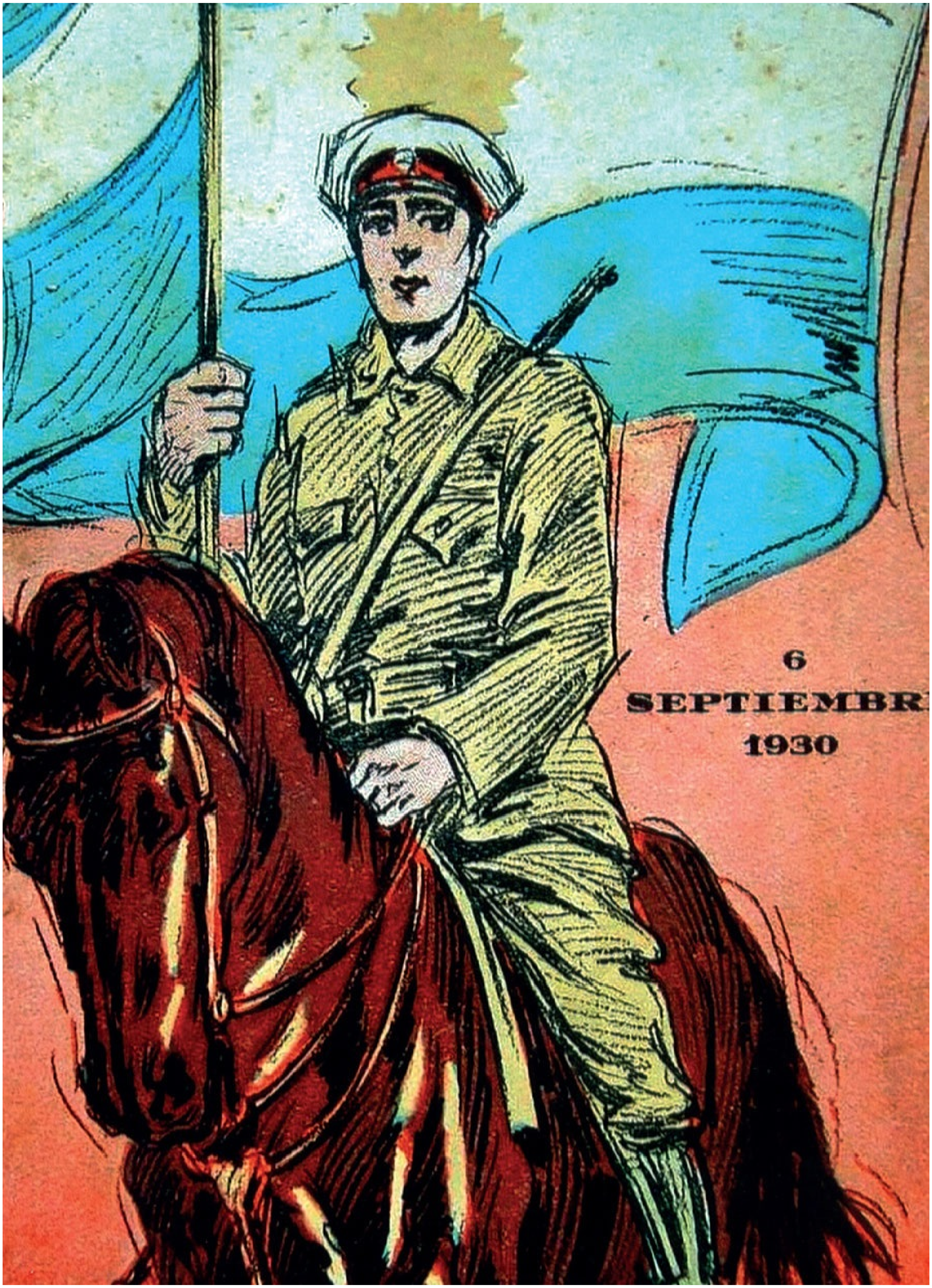
Nevertheless, Estigarribia knew that if Villa Montes fell the Bolivians would sue for peace, and prepared to attack the fortress. In February the first Paraguayan attacks against Villa Montes began, but frontal assaults on the well dug in Bolivian defenses were extremely costly. The Paraguayan Army could not sustain these losses and their command began to look desperately for ways to break the Bolivian resistance. Heavy fighting continued from February to March, and then into April with a stalemate and a great loss of morale amongst the Paraguayan troops. Mortar units were rationed to ten shells per day, so they were certainly not going to break the Bolivian defenses by bombardment. General Estigarribia knew that if his army was to reduce the Bolivian defenses at Villa Montes, he needed heavy artillery. An audacious plan was hatched to dismount 120mm guns from the Paraguayan Navy’s Italian-built gunboats. These would then be dragged by a Caterpillar tractor through the desert and across specially strengthened bridges to Villa Montes. Once they were emplaced in prepared concrete bunkers, they could outrange the 105mm guns of the Bolivians. Before the plan could be put into practice, however, both nations came to their senses and ended the slaughter.

**The two opposing commanders meet for a cordial chat during the peace talks between Bolivia and Paraguay in May 1935. Second from left is Marshal Jose Felix Estigarribia, the Paraguayan commander-in-chief credited with winning the war. General Enrique Penaranda, the Bolivian commander-in-chief, is second from the right in the photograph. He had taken over command from General Kundt in 1933 and had performed well in his role during the last few years of the war. Penaranda was hamstrung by the controlling President Salamanca, while Estigarribia had a better relationship with President Ayala. (Library of Congress)**

## The End

With both nations exhausted by three years of war, the battle for Villa Montes ended in June 1935, as Bolivia and Paraguay realized they simply could not sustain the conflict. Both countries were financially and physically on their knees and the war had long ago turned into a costly and bloody stalemate. Even if the Paraguayans had defeated the Bolivians at Villa Montes, they could not have occupied any more territory. Paraguay simply could not afford to continue the fighting and was running out of men to send to the front anyway. Although on paper wealthier than Paraguay, Bolivia had used up all its lines of finance secured against its mineral wealth. A ceasefire was arranged for June 12, and one of the most wasteful and futile Latin American conflicts was over. Paraguay had won the war by gaining 150,000 square miles of territory but had lost 36,000 men, or a staggering one in 27 of its population. Bolivia had suffered 57,000 dead, or one in 50 of its population, and had spent millions of pounds in arms and ammunition. It was estimated that the Paraguayans captured over $10,000,000 worth of Bolivian arms, some of which they sold on to the Republicans during the Spanish Civil War. Whereas Paraguay at least had its captured territory to show for its victory, Bolivia had nothing to console its people for their losses. Although the fighting ended in 1935, the peace agreement took nearly as long as the war lasted to agree, with the final deal being signed by both parties on July 21, 1938.

# CONFLICTS OF THE 1930s


6
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**The cover of an Argentinean book glorifies the actions of the military in their coup d’état of September 6, 1930. President Hipolito Yrigoyen’s unpopular government fell after the combined army, navy, and air force of Argentina rebelled. The actions of the military were widely supported by the Argentinean population in 1930, who mobbed them as they advanced from their barracks in the cities. It was often the case in South American coups that different branches supported rival political factions and fought each other. This was the case during the Argentinean 1955 Naval Rebellion, and in 1963, when the navy and its air arm and marines clashed with army and air force units. (Author’s Collection)**

All of Latin America was badly affected by the US stock market crash of 1929, but some countries were hit worse than others. Bolivia, Peru, and Chile were reported to be the worst hit of the South American nations, with the first two fighting border conflicts with their neighbours during the 1930s. These wars were fought over disputed territories and their natural resources, whose control promised better fortunes for the economically struck nations. The Chaco War between Bolivia and Paraguay (see Chapter 7) and the fighting between Peru and Colombia during the Leticia Incident (see Chapter 9) were largely motivated by economic necessity. Brazil was particularly badly hit by the Great Depression, with its staple export, coffee, falling by 50 percent. The country saw a number of civil conflicts in the 1930s, with the more powerful of its states fighting for political control (see Chapter 5). New political forces emerged in the 1930s, when, as in Depression-hit Europe, Latin America saw the rise of fascism and communism. Fascist attempts to gain power by force in Brazil and Chile failed dismally, and another attempt by Communists in the former country was similarly unsuccessful. El Salvador saw one of the most tragic attempts at a left-wing revolution in 1932, which resulted in savage reprisals against the peasantry.

**Machine gunners of the Argentinean Army man their gun in a prominent building in Buenos Aires in September 1930. They are taking part in the overthrow by force of the incumbent government of long-term president, Hipolito Yrigoyen. Although the coup had a great deal of popular support, its success was to usher in decades of almost constant military rule. Most Argentinean presidents were high-ranking military officers, who often ruled with a compliant civilian government. (Cody Images)**

## The Argentinean Coup 1930

In 1930 Argentina was one of the ten wealthiest nations in the world and was governed by the civilian government of President Hipolito Yrigoyen. Yrigoyen was the head of the Argentinean Radical Party and had been first elected as president in 1916, but he had faced a number of crises over the years. His control of the economy had, like many other leaders in the late 1920s, been affected by the Wall Street Crash of 1929. Despite the increasing signs that he was losing his grip on the country, he had been re-elected in 1928 with a strong mandate from the people. By the summer of 1930 he was in his 70s, and seemed to have lost the political acumen that had kept him in power for nearly 15 years. This lack of authority could be explained by reports that he was suffering from the first signs of dementia. His biggest mistake was not to take care of the Argentinean Army, which in 1930 was 27,500 strong. He had reduced the military budget substantially and had delayed many officers’ promotions to save money. In addition, he had politicized the previously neutral army by favoring officers who were loyal to him. His main political opponents were the Argentine Patriotic League, or APL, and the “Nacionalistas,” both pro-Fascist groups. The APL had been planning a coup against the president since 1927, and in 1930 it approached General Jose Felix Uriburu for help. On September 6, the general drove confidently into Buenos Aires with a small escort and arrested President Yrigoyen. They found him at his executive mansion, Casa Rosada, and forced him to resign, with the general taking temporary control of the country. With no real opposition from the Socialists, who were the only group capable of putting up any resistance, the coup was virtually bloodless. Only 1,500 troops actually took part in the coup, while the rest of the army and its officers were happy to stand aside. Most of the coup participants were junior officers, who had been the worst affected by the lack of prospects for promotion. They marched from their base at Campo de Mayo and then paraded around the city in a show of strength. General Uriburu acted swiftly to change the whole political outlook of the country, banning political parties and suspending elections and the 1853 Constitution. All this was done with little complaint from the Argentinean population, most of whom were happy just to see a stable regime in charge. Uriburu did not want to hold power and established a Conservative–Military Alliance known as the “Concordoncia,” which lasted until 1943.

**Chilean troops take part in a route march in September 1930 at the time of a abortive rebellion against the president, Carlos Ibanez. A small group of exiled military officers and politicians had been flown into Chile by two US pilots, Edward Orville de Larin and Reid Smith-Doyle. They tried to incite the Chacabuco Regiment to support their rebellion, but failed dismally in their efforts. The two American adventurers were arrested, but were surprisingly only charged with not having the correct papers for entering Chilean territory. (Cody Images)**

## Chile’s Decade of Coups 1932–39

Chile had a reputation in the 1910s to 1930s of being one of the most stable governments in Latin America. However, in the 1930s, Chile was to see a series of successful and unsuccessful coups d’état against its governments. The first involved the overthrow of President Colonel Carlos Ibanez del Campo by a military coup in the autumn of 1931. He was replaced by the radical politician Juan Esteban Montero as president, who in turn was overthrown in early June of 1932 by the first of two coups in that year. This coup was under the control of a military junta, with the air force commander, Marmaduke Grove Vallejo, at its head. It took place on June 4, when planes flew over the capital of Santiago dropping leaflets on the presidential palace that called on Montero to resign. Pilots and ground crew then marched on the presidential palace under the leadership of Carlos Davila. As the coup was underway, Vallejo took it upon himself to declare a Chilean Socialist Republic. He immediately began to issue edicts calling for the setting up of a left-wing government and the introduction of basically communist policies. Chile was not ready for this kind of government and after 12 days Vallejo was overthrown by his fellow junta colleague Davila. He continued the basic idea of a Socialist Republic but found little support for his ideas before he in turn was overthrown on September 13. This so-called “counterattack by the state,” or “Antofagasta Coup,” was led by General Pedro Vignola, and restored civilian rule. However, the Chilean Army was unsatisfied with the election of President Arturo Allesandri Palma and some of its officers began plotting. Yet another coup was attempted in 1936, which was the third time that President Palma’s office had been threatened in three years. In September 1938 another coup took place in Santiago, but this one was an attempt by the small National Socialist Movement to try to take power. It occurred during the three-way election campaign involving the Liberal–Conservatives, the Radical Popular Front, and the Popular Alliance parties. Like most countries in the late 1920s and 1930s, Chile had its own fascist party, the National Socialist Movement or MNSCh, which was largely supported by middle-class youths. In the 1930s, political groups all over the world were trying to take power with non-democratic means. The MNSCh supported the newly formed Popular Alliance and its leader, ex-president Carlos Ibanez del Campo. A group of fanatical young MNSCh supporters decided that they only way that Ibanez was going to come to power was via a coup d’état. At 12.30 on September 3, a group of 30 armed youths occupied the Seguro Obrero or “Workers Insurance” building in the center of Santiago. During the takeover they killed a policeman and then took up positions at the windows of the building. At the same time another group of 32 youths had occupied the main building of the Chilean National University. At 2.00am the next morning, a large number of Carabineros stormed both buildings looking to avenge the death of their comrade. The Fascists were offered amnesty if they gave up the fight, and all agreed to accept the offer. Once they were outside the two buildings, they were gathered together and lined up against a wall and shot. Sixty of them died, but four managed to escape to tell the tale, although no one in the incumbent government of President Arturo Allessandri Palma would admit giving the order. The last Chilean coup of the 1930s took place after the same president had finished his term of office in December 1938. This failed coup in August 1939 was a poorly organized affair by a single artillery regiment of the Chilean Army against the government of President Aguirre Cerda.

**Chilean civilian volunteers undergo training to join the government army in the political crisis of 1932. They appear to be professional middle-class men who are wearing their office wear on parade before being issued with their uniforms. The Chilean Government had appealed for volunteers to counter the attempted revolt by the navy in September. (Cody Images)**

**The aftermath of the abortive Nacista rebellion saw the 60 or so rebels surrender before being marched off to expected captivity in September 1938. Matters took a gruesome turn when nearly all of the young Fascists were lined up against a wall and unceremoniously shot. Their bodies were later found mutilated as a warning to anyone else of whatever political persuasion who tried to rebel. The government, to their shame, had gone against their promise to spare the lives of the rebels if they surrendered. Four survivors did manage to escape in the panic and confusion, and their testimony would also have served as a warning to opponents of the government. (Library of Congress)**

## The Ecuadorian Civil War 1932

In 1931 the largely ineffectual Ecuadorian president, Isidro Ayora, was overthrown by a military coup. He was replaced by the Conservative politician Neptali Bonifaz Ascazubi after elections in early 1932. The Ecuadorian Congress, however, said that Bonifaz was “unfit to govern” on account of his Peruvian ancestry. Bonifaz and his supporters then suspended the Congress, and he took up the role of president despite increasing opposition. The Ecuadorian people were now divided into pro and anti-Bonifaz camps, with any Liberals and left-wingers opposing him. They were unhappy that Bonifaz had been supported in his candidacy by the semi-fascist workers organization the Compactacion Obrera Nacional or CON. The CON was supported by some Ecuadorian workers but were totally opposed by all left-wing and Liberal supporters.

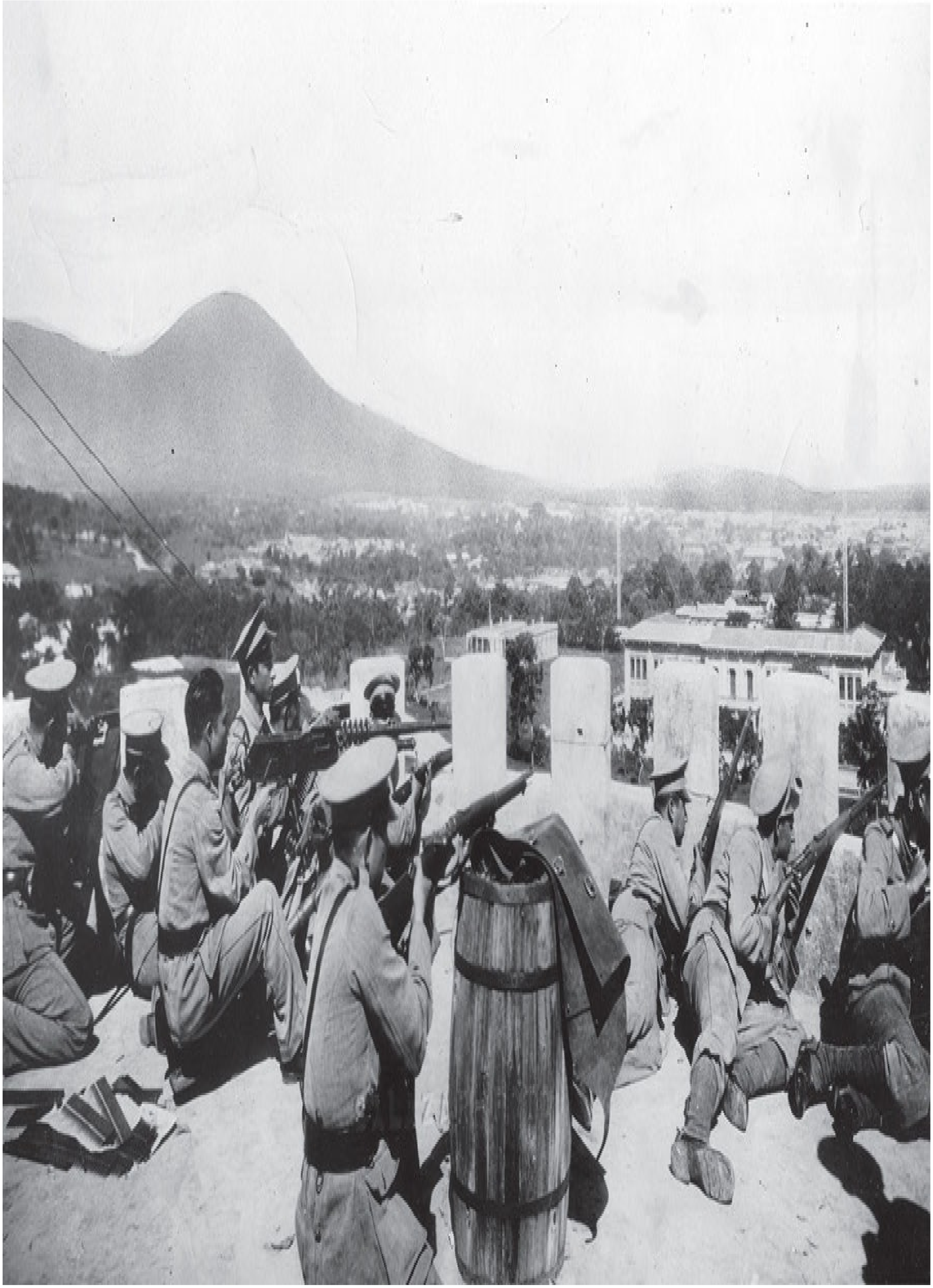
President Bonifaz had other problems in April 1932, when the two-gunboat Ecuadorian Navy mutinied in the city of Guayaquil. While this rather irritating rebellion was taking place, the two political wings of Conservatives–Fascists and Liberals–left-wingers were arming their supporters. On August 29, 1932, matters came to a head when armed groups from the Left and Right took to the streets of the Ecuadorian capital, Quito. The majority of the Ecuadorian Army in Quito stayed out of the conflict, but four army battalions did support Bonifaz and the

CON. Both the left-wing and right-wing political groups raised paramilitary groups to protect their respective neighborhoods by erecting barricades across the narrow streets of Quito. Some arms were taken from police stations or from soldiers who did not want to get involved in the fighting, but many militiamen only had machetes. Over the next four days the street fighting was intense, with the long-standing hatred between the different political militias meaning no quarter was given. The Catholic Church supported the right-wing militias and press reports of priests directing their fire from their church steeples were featured in The New York Times. After four days of fighting, the lack of support from the majority of the Quito garrison made the pro-presidential forces lose heart. Pleas from both sides for the provincial units of the 5,400-strong Ecuadorian Army to come to their aid fell on deaf ears, and they stayed in their barracks for the first few days. After four days of fighting, up to 500 fighters and a similar number of civilians had been killed in the tightly packed streets of the capital. The army commanders to the north and south of the capital now decided to act and several trains full of troops headed for Quito. Despite attempts by the right-wing units to stop them entering the city, the pro-Liberal army units entered Quito on September 1. Joining with the left-wing and Liberal militias, they marched on the presidential palace and restored the Congress. The head of the senate took temporary charge of the government, but after elections in 1933, a Liberal, Juan de Dios Martinez Mera, was elected. Ecuador was to see a number of political and military upheavals over the next eight years, which meant it was ill prepared to face the threat posed by Peru in 1941 (see Chapter 9).

Ecuadorian soldiers with an Italian Fiat-Revelli Modello 1914 heavy machine gun are seen at the time of the 1932 revolution. Some Italian weaponry and equipment was purchased by Ecuador, after the arrival of a military mission from that country in 1922. The military advisors established various military schools during their time in Ecuador, including a small aviation school. By 1932, the Ecuadorian Army had a full-time strength of 5,400, but due to economic constraints it had been reduced by about 500 by 1933. (Ecuador History Museum)

**These soldiers on parade in the Honduran capital Tegucigalpa are being inspected by Loyalist General Aguilar on April 20, 1931. His motley-looking recruits are to be sent to the northern Caribbean coastline of Honduras to counter the rebel General Ramon Diaz. Diaz had captured the town of Progresso and was ready to extend his campaign along the coast to take other ports. According to the photo caption the USA was rushing ships to the region, as they invariably did in the 1910s to 1930s. (Cody Images)**

**Guatemalan military officers and bodyguards are gathered around the latest man to rule the country in December 1930. General Manuel Orellano, in the center of the photograph, was the third president of Guatemala during a week of “musical chairs.” During the coup d’état that brought Orellano to power, the minister of war, General Mauro de Leon, was killed. He died during fierce fighting in the Guatemalan capital Tegucigalpa, a city that had grown used to this kind of conflict. Holding on to power in Central America usually depended on the support of the army, whose troops had to be kept happy by the president for that reason. (Author’s Collection)**



**Rebel Salvadorian troops use the roof of Fort El Sapote in El Salvador's capital San Salvador in December 1931. After several hours of street fighting, the incumbent government of President Arturo Araujo was overthrown in yet another Central American coup. These soldiers supported the provisional government of the former war minister, Maximiliano Hernandez Martinez. A typical government in Latin America often lasted only a few days or weeks before another disgruntled general acted against it. (Cody Images)**

## El Salvador – "La Matanza" 1932

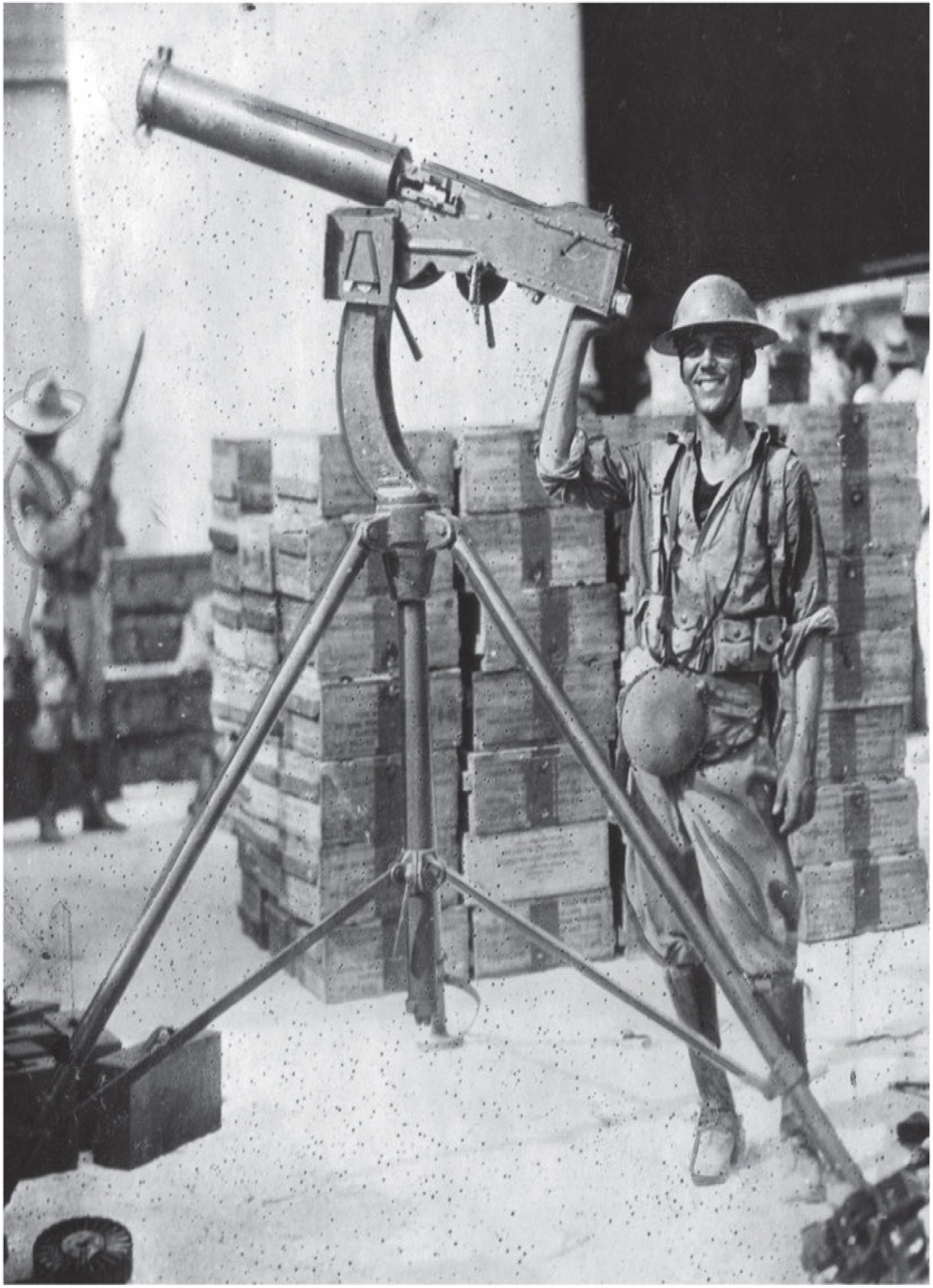
El Salvador in the early 1930s was one of the most unequal societies in the world, with 14 powerful families owning everything. With no viable middle class, it was a feudal society where you were either rich or dirt-poor and working for a few pesos a day. With no hope of improving their lot even by a tiny amount, the downtrodden and desperate peasants were ready for rebellion. The overthrow of the progressive President Arturo Araujo in 1931 who had only been in office for only nine months ended any hope of democratic change. There was, however, a small Communist Party in El Salvador, which in late 1931 began planning a revolution. Their first act was to form a revolutionary military committee and stockpile the pitifully small number of rifles and thousands of machetes they needed to arm their supporters. They managed to gain the support of some troopers in the 1st Regiment of Cavalry, who would form the main military force available to them when the revolution began on January 22. They also sent messages to the organized left-wingers in Honduras and Guatemala asking for their help. The intention was to create a "Red Army," which if successful in El Salvador could then go on to "liberate" the rest of Central America. President Maximiliano Hernandez Martinez was tipped off by his friend the Guatemalan president about the Communists' plans. On January 18, a state of siege was declared by Martinez and any military conspirators were immediately arrested. Known members of the Communist Party who were not in hiding were also arrested, including Augustin Farabundo Marti, an associate of

Augustin Sandino in Nicaragua. These arrests triggered off the rebellion, which was centered in western El Salvador and was led by machete-wielding peasants. They targeted any landowners and their staff as well as any military personnel they came across. In total about 100 people were killed by the revolutionaries before the army was able to protect them. What followed was one of the most brutal and indiscriminate counter-revolutions in modern Latin American history. Army units marched into the towns and villages of western El Salvador and arrested all members of the Communist Party. At the same time they called for the formation of right-wing sympathizers into a “Guardias Civicas” militia. All those “Reds” already arrested were shot, apart from a few leaders who were earmarked for public execution. The army and Guardias Civicas then proceeded to arrest and shoot anyone who might have had even the slightest sympathy with the revolution. Troops marched into many villages and took the whole male population away, shooting them at a “respectable” distance. Although Martinez had been offered support from the USA and some ships were dispatched to El Salvador, he politely refused any help. He wanted to deal with the rebels in “his own way” and his forces went on to kill up to 25,000 mostly innocent Indian peasants. This “Matanza” or “slaughter” included all the main Communist leaders, with Farabundo Marti being shot in February 1932. Marti was to become the best-known martyr of the massacres and his image and name were used by the El Salvadorian guerrilla movement of the 1980s and 1990s.

## The “Revolt of the Sergeants” – Cuba 1933

Since its independence from Spain in 1898 Cuba’s government had been dominated by the USA, whose money supported its economy. Cuba had been ruled since 1924 by the government of Gerardo Machado, who was re-elected for a second term in 1928. After his re-election Machado turned into a tyrant, which led to the growth of a strong opposition to his now unpopular regime. Many disgruntled soldiers joined a secret 2,000-strong organization, the ABC, set up to overthrow Machado. Its members included a sergeant by the name of Fulgencio Batista. Batista may have only been an NCO but he held an important post at army headquarters that gave him access to information useful to the resistance. He was a highly intelligent man who had spent most of his spare time educating himself. Along with all his fellow NCOs, Batista was unhappy with his army career and was full of resentment. Much of the resentment in army ranks came from Machado’s policy of stopping the progression of NCOs to officer ranks. This policy created a large number of capable NCOs who would normally have progressed to junior officer ranks, including Batista. On August 12, 1933, Machado was overthrown by a military coup and he fled to the safety of the Bahamas. A military junta now took control of Cuba, but it was poorly organized and did not have the necessary skills to form a government. No viable politicians came forward to take control of the rudderless Cuban Government, and chaos ensued. The political parties that had campaigned for the dictator to go were now falling out amongst themselves. The ambitious 32-year-old Batista now took his chance by organizing the many NCOs like him into a new revolutionary group that could take power. On September 4, Batista addressed a rally of NCOs and other ranks at Camp Columbia and announced his revolt. He told the men that they could not rely on the old higher-ranking officers to restore order in Cuba and it was up to them to do so. The revolt soon spread to other camps and military posts and gained support from some politicians. In the USA the government of Franklin D. Roosevelt looked on in dismay as the events in Cuba unfolded. Batista, who had now promoted himself to colonel, was seen by the Americans as a revolutionary and they looked for their Cuban allies to deal with him. As soon as Batista had consolidated his hold on power, he dealt with the 900 officers displaced by his coup. In total 200 were allowed to stay with the Cuban Army, while another 300 went into retirement, exile, or prison. This left 400 highly disgruntled officers who were not prepared to let an upstart like Batista take over the country. A total of 500 men, including some other ranks, gathered together at the Hotel Nacional de Cuba in Havana. They fortified the hotel, which was quickly surrounded by troops loyal to Batista, who demanded that the officers and their men surrender. On the morning of October 2, when negotiations had failed, the battle for the hotel began. The battle raged for most of the day, with Batista’s machine gun positions firing into the hotel. Many of the officers holed up in the hotel were excellent shots and their sniping killed over 200 of the besiegers. Batista’s forces got the support of the gunboat Cuba, which fired towards the hotel, but most of its shells fell into the surrounding houses. By mid-afternoon, the heavily outnumbered officers surrendered under a white flag having only suffered two killed. Some soldiers who had lost friends in the fighting now took revenge and about 16 of the surrendering officers were killed before calm was restored. A month later, another threat to Batista’s rule came from army units loyal to the ABC revolutionary movement that he had been a member of. This uprising began on November 8 and was a much more serious threat than the one in October. Organized by some of the more popular officers who had rebelled in September, the ABC revolt broke out in Havana, Santiago, and other towns all over Cuba. Most ABC rebels had been unwilling to serve under Batista. The rebels had the support of most air force pilots who stole their planes from Camp Columbia air base and bombed Batista-supporting troops in Havana. Batista's soldiers captured the airfields, killing 20 rebels, and stopped the rebel pilots from landing. This revolt was seen by some as a true revolution, while Batista's revolt had been a simple military takeover. The fighting became particularly bitter, with former comrades happily killing each other and no prisoners taken. Batista had more men and his forces gradually took control of the cities, but it took until the end of 1933 before his forces were in total control of Cuba. A "A Hundred Days Government" then took over the governance of Cuba but was overthrown by Batista and his US backers in January 1934. For the next six years, Batista was the real power behind the throne, as a series of proxy governments controlled Cuba with his approval. In 1940 he was finally elected president and held power until 1944 and then again in 1952. Whatever official or unofficial role that Batista played in the 1930s and 1940s, he was to dominate Cuban politics until his overthrow in the late 1950s (see Chapter 11).

**Soldiers of the El Salvadorian Army guard terrified peasants during the "Matanza" of early 1932. A Communist-organized rebellion involving some army units in western El Salvador was poorly organized. In the general confusion some peasants armed with machetes went on the rampage, killing 100 landowners and military personnel. Army units and right-wing militias then went into the region and arrested thousands of people, including all Communist Party members, who were shot. They then arrested anyone suspected of supporting the rebellion and preceded to shoot thousands of them indiscriminately. It was estimated that up to 25,000 people were slaughtered during the massacres, but no one was counting, especially not the army and its death squads. (Author's Collection)**



**A smiling soldier of the Cuban Army poses with a captured Browning heavy machine gun taken from rebel forces in August 1931. The short-lived insurrection in Gibara was crushed after three days of heavy fighting with less than a hundred casualties. Behind the soldier are piles of ammunition boxes captured from the rebels. All the rebel leaders were taken prisoner and sent to trial, where they would receive short shrift from the Cuban Government. (Cody Images)**

**A mountain gun of the Cuban Army is aimed towards government buildings in the capital Havana by supporters of the Revolt of the Sergeants in September 1933. This military coup was led by Cuban NCOs who had been denied promotions due to the policies of the government of President Gerardo Machado. After the success of the coup, its leader, Master Sergeant Fulgencio Batista, then acted as power broker for a series of proxy presidents from January 1934. (Author’s Collection)**

## The Uruguayan Revolution 1935

Uruguay had gained a reputation as the most stable South American country ever since its civil war ended in 1904. Known in the region as the “Switzerland of Latin America,” the country still had the usual political difficulties during the 1910s and 1920s. During the 1930s Uruguay’s stability was achieved at the cost of the so-called “Machete Dictatorship” of its president, Doctor Gabriel Terra, who controlled the country from 1931 until 1938. Any opposition to Terra’s rule was swiftly dealt with, although this did not stop the campaigns of a veteran politician, Basilio Munoz. The 75-year-old Munoz had been involved in Uruguayan politics for many years and had the reputation to put together a broad anti-Terra Alliance. This “Popular Front” involved leftists as well as dissidents from the Liberal Colorado and Conservative Blanco parties. Realizing that there was no possibility of defeating Terra democratically, Munoz and his followers organized an invasion of the country in January 1935. On the 27th, his tiny force of a few hundred men crossed the border from southern Brazil into the north of Uruguay. As soon as they crossed the border they were confronted by units of the Uruguayan Army and had to break up into several small bands. The small but efficient Uruguayan Air Force or Avacion Militar was now called into action against the rebels. Potez 25 light bombers and a few armed Tiger Moth trainers now began a bombing campaign against Munoz’s already demoralized men. Some of Munoz’s men had taken shelter in the Rio Negro mountains but were discovered by government reconnaissance planes. According to reports, the pilots targeted the rebels’ horses instead of the men so as to force them to travel by foot. Whether this was a sign of their sympathy for Munoz’s cause or simply a way to thwart his campaign is not known. Nevertheless Munoz and his men continued their campaign for most of February before they fought their grandly named “Battle of Paso Morlan,” fought on February 28. This glorified skirmish was fought between a 72-strong rebel force and a 56-strong government force. The government force was made up of soldiers from 11th Infantry Battalion and a section of armed police. Casualties were light, with three rebel dead and two government officers killed, but this battle effectively ended the rebel cause. Although both sides claimed victory in the battle, Munoz now realized that his attempt to defeat the hated Terra was over. Despite his defeat of the 1935 attempt to overthrow him, Terra’s days in power were coming to an end. Surprisingly, he lost power through democratic not military means when he was defeated in the general election of 1938.

## The “Suicidal Rebellion,” Mexico 1938–39

After the 1929 rebellion in Mexico (see Chapter 3) the country settled into a period of relative peace and stability. Under the old military system, powerful generals had run the state or part of state they were in as virtual warlords, or “Caudillos.” This Caudillo system had been almost totally dismantled after the 1920s rebellions, with political generals no longer tolerated. Most Mexican generals had been forced to accept the changes and their loss of power. The Cardanas government was determined by the late 1930s to end this archaic system by negotiation or by force. In reality there was only one powerful Caudillo left, General Saturnino Cedillo, who clung on to his control of San Luis Potosi State in Central Mexico. Cedillo, a 45-year-old former high ranking Villista officer, had been able to cling on to power in his state for 20 years. He achieved this because he was relatively popular with the state’s population and had looked after his troops. Many of his older troops had been given land to farm in so-called “military colonies” and these men’s loyalty to Cedillo was assured. With about 20,000 veteran troops having a stake in Cedillo’s survival, he felt confident enough to defy the government. One thing was for certain: he was not willing to give up his power without a fight, and in the mid-1930s had tried to import modern weaponry into the state. Everything came to a head when

President Cardanas arrived in San Luis Potosi in an armored train with a strong escort in early May 1938. His troops proceeded to disarm any regular troops loyal to Cedillos and threaten anyone who supported him with arrest and execution. Cedillo's honor was now at stake and he was not prepared to face further humiliation by Cardanas, so on May 20, he announced his rebellion.

## The Opposing Forces

During the 1930s Cedillo had attempted to build up his military strength and buy arms, which he had been denied by the government. In May 1936 a train crammed full with rifles, machine guns, and light artillery was confiscated by the Federal Army as it approached San Luis Potosi. The following year Cedillo did manage to purchase six US aircraft of unknown types with the help of his American pilot and bodyguard, Floyd Peart Clevenger. Reports that he had a fleet of 57 planes when he began his rebellion were obviously exaggerated, but he may have acquired a total of 10–14 aircraft. He must have been successful in buying some arms shipments, as during the fighting his troops were captured with Japanese and German rifles not in use with the Federal Army. When the rebellion began, Cedillo gallantly refused the services of his Mexican Revolution veterans. Instead he was reported to have armed 14,000–15,000 Indian volunteers, who he must have considered as expendable. Cedillo did have some machine guns and artillery, but his army was totally outgunned by the Federales. Promised support from Mexico's Fascist movement, the "Gold Shirts," did not materialize. The international press tended to label Cedillo as the "Fascist General," but he was not one – he was an out-of-date traditionalist. On the government side, a reported 10,000 regulars were in San Luis Potosi State when the fighting started. This number was soon expanded to 20,000 troops with the support of 17 Mexican Air Force light bombers, including two of the latest V-99M Corsairs from the USA.

## The Rebellion

Cedillo's whole command structure was built around his extended family, many of whom were ex-Federal officers. A few days after the rebellion began the rebels faced their first setback when Cedillo’s nephew Hipolito was killed in action on May 23. In the same battle Cedillo’s men lost 14 precious field guns, many cases of dynamite, and their only portable radio set. Two days later Cedillo’s brother in law was killed, and the next day 400 of his troops surrendered to the Federales. Already his Indian troops were drifting away at the first opportunity, despite the threat of being shot for desertion. A further 600 men surrendered on May 26 and Cedillo was beginning to lose heart. He had tried to gather support from other anti-Cardanas commanders and sent one of his planes to drop leaflets on the HQ of General Manuel Palaez in Tampico. No one was willing, however, to risk their lives on what was described at the time as a “suicidal rebellion.” The best that Cedillo could now hope was to cause as much disruption as possible to the government. On the 27th his men derailed a train with 28 US citizens aboard, killing the crew and robbing the passengers. With 1,500 men of his original 14,000 left Cedillo planned to head for his mountain stronghold, which he was rumored to have been preparing for several years. While things had been going badly on the ground, the air war over the deserts of San Luis Potosi was going little better. At the start of the rebellion Cedillo had tried to put some kind of air force into the air, having learned lessons from the failure of Escobar’s rebellion in 1929. He had three of the original six US fighter bombers left from before the war and these were flown by a mixture of German and US pilots. On May 25, his personal transport plane had been flown to attack President Cardanas’ headquarters in the state capital. It dropped four bombs with one landing only 200 yards from his HQ, but no damage was done. In retaliation Federal planes bombed the rebel airfield at El Rucio the following day, damaging one of the three rebel planes hidden under trees. Another raid on the 31st destroyed the two remaining planes and ended the rather farcical air campaign.

## Hunted Fugitives

By early June any pretense that he had widespread support was gone for Cedillo, and his remaining supporters and family took to the hills. For the rest of 1938 they were fugitives living in the desert and only fighting the Federal Army when necessary. During this period a number of Cedillo’s relatives, including his sister, fell into Federal Army hands and all were tortured and executed in a brutal fashion. On June 2, Cedillo’s mistress was captured and executed, while his wife and children had already fled the country. The only motivation for Cedillo and his men now was to take as many of the enemy with them before they were eventually killed. For the next eight months Cedillo and his dwindling band of supporters evaded the Federal Army, moving from one hiding place to another. The rebels’ luck held out until January 1939 when his remaining band were cornered by Federal troops. When the general and his son were killed in a skirmish on the 11th, Cedillo’s body was put on display by the victorious Federal troops. Cedillo’s death ended any remaining chance of rebellion by frustrated former revolutionaries or ambitious generals of the Mexican Revolution era.

**Mexican Government troops are moved by rail to the seat of the Cedillo rebellion in the state of San Luis Potosi in 1938. This rebellion was really a throwback to the army rebellions of the 1920s and its defeat was to end an era of military strongmen in Mexico. Known as the last of the Caudillos, General Cedillo refused to accept the changes going on in Mexico and railed against the Liberal government of President Cardanas. As in every Mexican conflict since 1910, the railway proved to be a decisive weapon for the army in defeating Cedillo. (Cody Images)**

# WAR IN THE AMAZON

**In November 1932, Colombian Civil Guards march towards the town of Leticia, which had recently been captured by armed Peruvian Nationalists. In both armies, these second-line troops played an important part during the "Incident" in 1932 and 1933. Often the Civil Guards were better turned out and more disciplined than their regular army comrades. (Cody Images)**

Ever since the countries of Latin America had won their independence from Spain and Portugal in the early 19th century, they had fallen out with each other over disputed borders. In the 20th century, most wars in Latin America were revolutions, civil wars, or border wars. Two of the most significant border wars of the period covered by this book took place in the vast Amazon region. These were the Leticia Incident fought between Colombia and Peru in 1932–33 and the Zarumilla or Maramon Conflict fought between Peru and Ecuador. Both these conflicts were fought for large tracts of barely populated and almost inhabitable jungle. In both wars, the countries involved were prepared to send their soldiers to die for these pieces of wilderness that were so important to their national pride.

**At the start of the Leticia Incident in 1932 Peruvian volunteers march past in Lima, wearing overalls before being issued with their uniforms. The patriotism of both the Peruvian and Colombian populations was whipped up into a nationalistic frenzy as the war began. Unfortunately for the Peruvians, getting most of these new recruits to the far-off war front proved too difficult before the war ended. (Cody Images)**

## “Jungle War” – The Leticia Incident 1932–33

The first jungle war began in 1932 in a remote region in the upper Amazon, in the border region between the two nations of Colombia and Peru. Although this conflict was not on the scale of the war going on in the Chaco desert at the same time, it took on great significance for the two countries. Ten years before, in March 1922, Peru had ceded some 2,250 square miles of their territory to Colombia under the terms of the Salomon-Lozano Treaty. In return, Colombia had recognized Peruvian claims to the Amazon region east of Ecuador. This territory ceded by Peru, known as the “Leticia Trapezium,” included, vitally, 68 miles of the northern bank of the mighty Amazon River. The treaty was extremely unpopular with nationalistic Peruvians and was not ratified until 1927, with opposition to it continuing into the 1930s. In the meantime, Colombian settlers had established a colony in the small strip of land and named their settlement Leticia. Although Leticia was a small colony, it was important to the commercial prosperity of Colombia as the main port for the export of monkey fur. It was also a base that could be used to exploit the natural resources of the region – rubber, rattan, and cotton. Peruvian Nationalists had never accepted this giveaway of their territory and lobbied for its return. In August 1932, 200 ultra-nationalists traveled from the Peruvian river port of Iquitos and attacked Leticia. This force was mainly made up of civilians armed with hunting rifles, but they did have 35 regular solders with them and had brought along an old cannon and machine gun. Leticia was poorly defended by 18 Colombian police and soldiers, who did not put up a fight when the Peruvians attacked on September 1. The actions of the Peruvian Nationalists were not officially sanctioned by their government but they did have the overwhelming support of the people. Things became more complicated when a Peruvian river boat took the Nationalists' supplies, thereby officially involving the authorities in Lima. It now looked as if the Peruvian Government was giving the Nationalists its approval, and this was confirmed when troops were landed at Leticia. These new developments were viewed by the Colombian Government as a virtual declaration of war. Most Peruvians were not worried by the reaction of the Colombian Government, as they thought that the Colombian people were "unwarlike" and would not be willing to fight for their country. When the Colombian Government did not meekly accept the situation, the Peruvians realized that they may have to fight for the newly occupied territory. Although not officially at war, both countries were now acting as if they were, and it was only a matter of time before full-scale conflict broke out.

**The Peruvian Army of 8,955 men had five infantry divisions with a total of 22 infantry battalions, five cavalry regiments, and five artillery regiments. They had a large number of artillery pieces, although most were pre-1914 models, and also had an anti-aircraft company available with a few modern 20mm antiaircraft guns. They had more than enough rifles to arm their troops, but many of these were older models and some were worn out. The 6,200-strong Colombian Army in 1932 was not only smaller than its Peruvian foe but was also poorly armed and equipped. The Colombians were particularly short of any weapon larger than a rifle and had a total of only 32 Austro-Hungarian Schwarzlose heavy machine guns. They had made small purchases of artillery before 1932 with a few Czechoslovakian Skoda 75mm mountain guns and 47mm anti-tank guns. In many ways the number of troops that each army had on paper was irrelevant, as it was the number of troops that could be moved to the theater of war that was important. The Colombian War Ministry was fully aware of its army's weaknesses, but it realized that the priority was to build a modern navy and air force. It was given a large budget of $10,000,000 by the government and immediately ordered ships, planes, and artillery. Although the army came last in the list of priorities, it did receive new artillery, machine guns, and rifles as part of the government's spending spree.**

Colombian military cadets and junior officers gather in the grounds of the military academy in the weeks before the outbreak of war with Peru. As with most Latin American armies, the smartness of these officer cadets was not matched by the rank and file. The officer taking aim with his pistol is armed with a Spanish Astra, one of the cheaper semi-automatics on the market in the 1930s. (Cody Images)

**These Peruvian soldiers seen in the early 1930s look like French Foreign Legionnaires with their Kepi hats with neck covers hanging from their backs. This was the uniform worn by most Peruvian troops during the Leticia Incident, even though steel helmets were available. Before the war began, Peru had a significant advantage over Colombia in heavy weaponry and aircraft. (Bettmann/Getty Images)**

**At the start of the war the Colombians had only 16 aircraft divided between the air force and naval air arm. They frantically began searching around for more planes, and just as importantly the pilots to fly them. They somehow managed to buy 26 fighters from the USA within a few weeks, along with the American pilots to fly them. In 1933 they were able to strengthen their air force further with the acquisition of 30 light bombers and 26 trainers. They managed to recruit 36 German pilots and a few Cubans to join the US pilots already flying for them. Foreign mechanics were also employed from a number of countries, giving the whole Colombian Air Force an international aspect. In total the Colombians managed to buy 29 Curtiss Model 35 Seahawk fighters during the conflict, along with 23 Curtiss Falcon light bombers and three Junkers Ju 52/3m transports. The Junkers were kept busy during the war ferrying troops from rear bases to the Leticia war zone. Most of the planes of all types were fitted with floats and used the rivers as their improvised landing grounds. Peru started the war with 60 aircraft, having amalgamated its air force and naval air element into one unified force. Although it was not as desperate to strengthen its number of aircraft, another 16 planes did arrive in time to take part in the war. It had Curtiss Seahawk II fighters, Fairey Fox ground-attack planes, 12 Italian Caproni Ca.111 transport/bombers, and 12 French Potez 39A reconnaissance bombers. The Peruvians also had a number of US aircraft, including Vought V-80 light bombers and Douglas O-38P reconnaissance planes. Unlike the Colombians, the Peruvians were less willing to fit floats to their planes, as they did could not see the advantage of altering them in this way.**

## The Peruvian Amazon Offensive 1932

The Peruvians were now aware that the Colombians would be moving forces into the disputed territory as soon as was humanly possible. Peru had the initial advantage of having 1,000 troops already in the region, with one battalion at their rear base to the west of Leticia at Iquitos and another battalion at Gueppi to the north-west of the colony.

The additional 653 troops were moved to Leticia by the river boat America and included three companies of infantry, a machine gun section, and a battery of Krupp M1908 guns. Known as the “Brigada Mixta Montana,” this unit was to form the main Peruvian combat force during the 1932–33 fighting. The Peruvians had to exploit their advantage in numbers before the Colombians could move troops into the war theater. A force was then sent to advance northwards from Leticia towards the only other settlement in the Leticia Trapezium, Tarapaca. A mixed force of Peruvian regulars and irregulars took Tarapaca and then began to dig in, having captured all of the disputed territory. The Colombian commander in the war zone was a bombastic and overconfident man who thought he could handle the Peruvians easily. He asked for 200 soldiers to deal with the problem and at first refused offers from the War Ministry in Bogota of 1,200 troops. After much arguing he agreed to accept 600 troops, but the government sent him 700 and he did not send any of them back. With only their rifles and a few machine guns, the Colombians could not hope to defeat the Peruvians without new weaponry.

**This Colombian heavy machine gun crew are firing their Austrian Schwarzlose M07 towards Peruvian positions in the Amazon jungle. The Colombians had a shortage of modern weaponry when the war began and they only had 32 of these machine guns in service. One of the crewmen has a large machete hanging from his waist to cut through the jungle undergrowth. (Cody Images)**

**According to the original caption on this photograph, this is one of the first images to emerge from the fighting between Colombia and Peru. These men are Colombian officers taking a break from the fighting and are wearing a mix of peaked caps and cork sun helmets. For most officers who came from the big cities like Bogota, serving in the steaming, humid jungles of the Amazon must have come as a shock to the system. (Cody Images)**

## The Navies

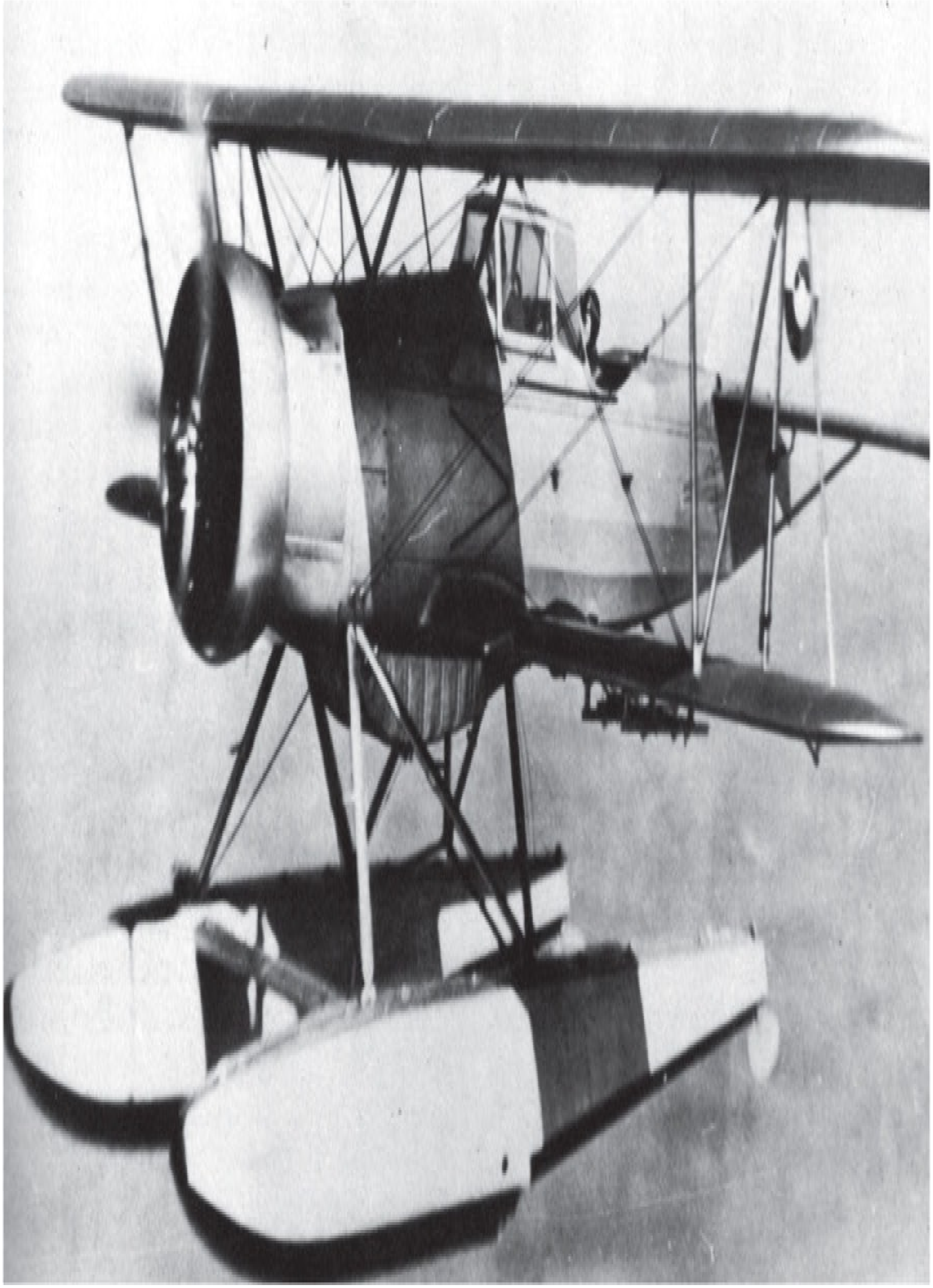
The Amazon River and its tributary the Putumayo River were to be vital to victory for both Peru and Colombia. Because of this the two navies saw a rapid expansion during the Leticia Incident, especially on the Colombian side. Peru had a substantial navy and river flotilla in 1932, with the former having a destroyer, two cruisers, and four submarines. Their upper Amazon river flotilla had three gunboats and a large number of smaller river vessels. A river steamer was converted into a gunboat and joined the river flotilla during the fighting. The single destroyer was also sent to "beef up" the river flotilla, whilst other sea-going ships patrolled the mouth of the Amazon River. During the war the Peruvians purchased two 15-year-old Russian destroyers from Estonia, and these were sent to blockade the mouth of the Amazon. In addition, the Peruvian Navy had a number of submarines, which operated as part of the blockading fleet. They were moved up river during the conflict but they struggled to operate in the shallow waters and had to withdraw. The Colombians were aware in 1932 that they needed to get substantial numbers of troops to the theater of operations quickly. If they left the Peruvians and their 1,000 troops in possession of the disputed territory for too long its occupation would become a fait accompli. The Amazon and its tributaries like the Putumayo River were the only available route to get troops to Leticia. Unfortunately, the only river boat in the theater of operations was an old stern-wheel gunboat on the Putumayo River. In total the Colombian Navy had the old gunboat, three river gunboats, and three coastguard vessels, along with six motor launches. None of these ships were adequate to move hundreds of troops many miles along rivers to the front line. They did have three new gunboats under construction in Britain, and these were needed quickly. The schedule for these was accelerated to get them to the theater of operations as soon as possible. The three Colombian gunboats built in Britain were hastily completed and crossed the Atlantic in 24 days. They managed to avoid the Peruvian blockade at the mouth of the Amazon and then traveled up the great river. After moving into the Putumayo River, the gunboats made a rendezvous with the old gunboat, Presidente Mosquera. There to meet them were two river transport ships with a total of 1,000 infantry and naval landing parties already embarked. This river flotilla was to prove vital for the next period of the war, when the Colombians were to go on to the offensive. Colombia continued to expand its naval capacity during the conflict, with two German minesweepers being purchased in 1933. They also managed to persuade the Portuguese Navy to sell them two brand-new destroyers right at the end of the war.

**The Colombian armored gunboat Cartegena moves along the Amazon River after helping their army capture Peruvian positions at Guepi in May 1933. The importance of the jungle river system to the Colombians during the Leticia fighting cannot be exaggerated. Because Peru could not get its superior forces to the theater of war, the Colombian River Flotilla and the troops and supplies it brought to the war was vital to victory. (Cody Images)**

## Colombia Goes on the Offensive

## The Fall of Tarapaca

The garrison of the Peruvian stronghold of Tarapaca was claimed to be 90 strong with 24 artillerymen and 66 infantrymen. They had six Krupp 75mm field guns with 50 shells and a few Hotchkiss medium machine guns to defend themselves with. Many of the 75mms shells had been damaged by the humid conditions they had been kept in and were too dangerous to fire. When the Colombian River Flotilla arrived opposite Tarapaca, the defenders realized that all was lost. Aboard the ships were 800 Colombian troops who were prepared to disembark and take the Peruvian stronghold. Before that the Colombian Air Force began to bomb the defenses while the guns of the six ships of the river flotilla joined in to soften up the already demoralized Peruvians. On February 14, the troops went ashore, and although there was initial resistance by some of the more determined defenders, the garrison surrendered the next day.



**A Colombian US-made Curtiss Cyclone Falcon floatplane is seen before being sent to the war zone in its factory silver finish. It was repainted in a two-tone camouflage and sent to join the other 22 that were used by Colombia during the Leticia Incident. Floatplanes were used by both sides during the conflict, with Curtiss also selling three of their Seahawk II to the Peruvians in 1933. The terrain in the war theater made this type of aircraft ideal, as the river became effectively a improvised airfield. (Author's Collection)**

**Peruvian troops who rebelled against the government in March 1933 during the Leticia Incident are guarded by loyal Civil Guards. The troops belong to the 11th Regiment, which had been defeated by loyal units after a four-hour gun battle. Few regular units got to fight against the Colombians during the 1932–33 war, with many being unreliable anyway. (Cody Images)**

## The Fall of Gueppi

The Peruvian garrison at Gueppi was cut off from supplies, which could no longer be brought up the Putumayo River. Its 209-strong garrison had to be supplied by porters moving along paths through the treacherous Amazonian jungle. Although some food and other supplies did get through, heavier equipment and weapons were almost impossible to transport. Attempts to move dismantled light artillery had to be abandoned and the only weaponry that got to Gueppi were five rusty old machine guns and four automatic rifles. It was difficult to get the heavy ammunition boxes for the machine guns through the jungle, so they had to be used sparingly. In contrast, the Colombians who encircled Gueppi had plenty of ammunition, which was brought to them by their navy’s gunboats and supply ships. On March 25, the Colombian River Flotilla moved its gunboats into position to bombard Gueppi’s defenses. The only assistance that the Peruvians could give the beleaguered garrison was to send three float planes from their base at Iquitos to attack the ships. These halfhearted attacks failed to hit their targets and the Colombians disembarked an assault force of several hundred men. Once they had waded ashore the Colombians split into two forces and moved to outflank the Peruvian defenses. On March 27, the Colombians, with support from their ships and from the air, stormed Gueppi as the Peruvians retreated into the jungle. During the assault, the Colombians used 50 kilos of TNT to blow up several of the defenders’ emplacements. The Peruvians suffered 27 killed during the attack, while the Colombians lost 16 killed and 13 wounded. Their loss of Gueppi left only Puerto Arturo in Peruvian hands in the war zone, and in Lima doubts were beginning to grow about the chances of victory.

## Puerto Arturo

The last Peruvian stronghold in the disputed region was the river port of Puerto Arturo, which had been bypassed by the Colombians during the earlier fighting. At that time the garrison was deemed to be too strong for the then-weaker Colombian forces to take by storm. A few months later it was now held by a 652-strong garrison, many of whom were sick, and 25 percent of them were unfit to fight. The garrison had been totally isolated by the Colombians, who had 1,000 relatively fit troops waiting to attack when orders came from Bogota. Although the Peruvians had three Krupp 75mm field guns, these were the older models with a shorter range than the modern Colombian field guns. The Colombians had also built a new air base a short distance from the Peruvian stronghold so their planes could bomb it easily. With this last port under threat and the supply lines from Lima so tenuous, the war was going badly for Peru.

## The End of the Conflict

In Lima, President Luis Sanchez Cerro was adamant that the war must be continued and began a campaign to raise a new 10,000-strong army to go to the Amazon. There was a lack of volunteers for what many saw as a suicidal mission and young men had to be press-ganged. On April 30, Cerro organized a parade of these “willing volunteers” to bolster morale and, while on the reviewing stand, he was assassinated. His successor General Oscar Benevides was in the pro-war camp, but the situation at the front was now going against Peru. After the fall of two of its main strongholds in the disputed territory and the threat of the fall of Puerto Arturo, the Peruvians were looking for a peaceful solution. They were also aware that the Ecuadorians, who they had their own territorial disputes, were talking to Colombia. If Colombia won one more victory, then the Ecuadorians would form an alliance and open another front on their disputed border with Peru. On May 24, the League of Nations brokered a ceasefire, which involved the temporary control of the disputed region by the international body. On June 23, the League of Nations took official control of Leticia, Gueppi, and Tarapaca along with the rest of the disputed territory. The ceasefire held and was followed, on September 27, by the signing of the Protocol of Rio de Janeiro, which officially ended the conflict. This agreement was a poor result for the Peruvians, who were forced to hand over all of the disputed region.

Peruvian pride was affronted and for the next seven years its armed forces built their strength up ready to enforce their power not against Colombia, but against Ecuador. At the end of the war both combatants issued ridiculously low casualty figures, with the Peruvians claiming 25 dead and the Colombians 27. However, both countries admitted that they had lost a large number of troops through disease, including 800 Peruvians and 200 Colombians. Most of these soldiers had died from the local tropical disease known as Putumayo fever.

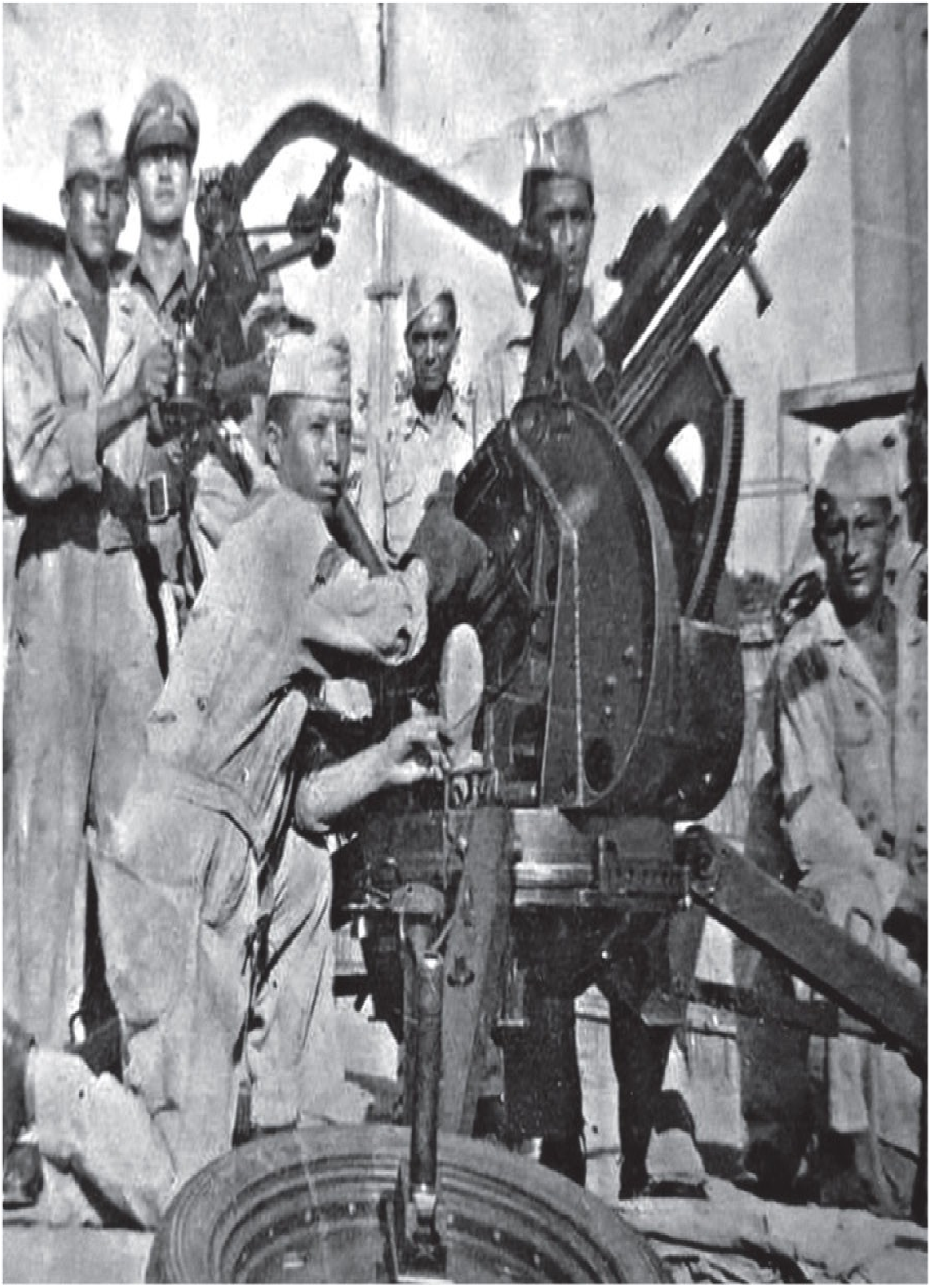
**Colombian troops sit in their trenches in the jungle of the Leticia region armed only with their Mauser rifles in May 1933. Because of the logistics of fighting in remote parts of the Amazon jungle, neither side had much heavy equipment or weaponry available. Colombia did, however, manage to bring more supplies into the theater of war than its Peruvian enemies. (Cody Images)**

## “Amazonian Blitzkrieg” – The Zarumilla War 1941

The German military term Blitzkrieg or lightning war is perhaps stretching it slightly when describing the Zarumilla War of the summer of 1941. However, this little-known conflict did feature the coordinated use of armor, paratroopers, and concentrated artillery to overcome a weaker foe. While most of the world was embroiled in its world war in 1941, two Latin American nations fought a war over a large tract of disputed territory. It was to see Italian-trained and helmeted Ecuadorians fighting French-helmeted and Czech-supplied Peruvian troops in the jungles of South America. Peru and Ecuador had had a long-running border dispute, which had already led to two conflicts in 1828 and 1859. After the last war a period of continuous tension followed with the threat of further wars always possible. Peru complained during the 1930s that Ecuadorian forces had been crossing the disputed border into Peruvian territory on several occasions and had established small posts there. By 1940, the border dispute threatened once again to lead to conflict between the two nations.

## The Peruvian Army 1941

After its embarrassing defeat by Colombia in 1932–33 the Peruvian Army of 8,000 men had been enlarged, and its equipment and especially its weaponry had been drastically improved. In 1941 the Peruvian Army had 15,200 men in five divisions with 14 infantry battalions, five cavalry regiments, six artillery groups, four battalions of engineers, and an antiaircraft unit. It had also proudly raised an armored battalion and its air force had formed a small paratroopers unit. Peru had imported modern heavy equipment and weaponry, including 95 Czech-made Praga T6 tracked artillery tractors during the 1930s. More impressively they had bought, also from Czechoslovakia, 24 CKD LTP light tanks with a 37mm gun main armament. In 1941 this tank was the most powerful in Latin America compared to the light tanks and tankettes of Argentina and Brazil. Artillery used by the Peruvians included newly acquired Italian 75mm and French Schneider 105mm field guns. The Peruvians had bought many other weapons, including 81mm mortars, ZB vz. 30 light machine guns, and Czech sub-machine guns. They had also standardized their rifles, getting rid of some of the older types, and nearly all their men were armed with latest Mausers. In preparation for the coming war the Peruvians had been holding maneuvers using their CKD LTP tanks alongside infantry and artillery units. They also moved their ground and air forces closer to the Ecuadorian border in late 1940, and their intentions became clear. As part of their preparations for war the Peruvian president, Manuel Prado Ugarteche, also ordered the formation of a Northern Military Group on January 11, 1941. It was made up of two divisions with three battalions each and four independent battalions and three artillery batteries. Peru’s air force had had a lot of money spent on it during the 1930s and had about 80 aircraft, including a number of brand-new Italian models. These were made up of 12 Caproni Ca.135 and 12 Caproni Ca.310 bombers as well as Caproni Ca.111 transports. The fighter force was mainly made up of North American NA-50s and Caproni Ca.114s, while its fighter bombers were US supplied Douglas 8A-3Ps. There were also some Fairey Fox reconnaissance planes and a number of float planes of various types.



**Ecuadorian anti-aircraft crewmen are seen at the start of their war with Peru drilling with their Italian Breda Model 35 20mm gun in early 1941. The Ecuadorians had four of these light guns along with a few old Italian mountain guns as their only heavy weaponry during the war. These guns were proudly displayed as the only visible war booty by the Peruvians at the end of the war. (Author's Collection)**

**At the start of the Zarumilla War between Peru and Ecuador, an infantry regiment of the Peruvian Army marches through Lima, their capital. These smartly turned out troops belong to one of the better units of the Peruvian Army in 1941. They are wearing the temperate grey-green uniform that was largely replaced in the field during the 1941 war with tropical uniforms. (Cody Images)**

## The Ecuadorian Army 1941

The Ecuadorian Army had seen little action during the early 20th century, with its only combat experience being in its civil conflicts in the 1910s and briefly in 1932. An Italian military mission had been in Ecuador for a number of years and its instructors worked in its engineering and artillery schools. There was little heavy weaponry in the Ecuadorian Army, but under the influence of the Italian instructors they had imported a few modern Italian Breda 20mm anti-aircraft guns. They also purchased WWI-era 65mm mountain guns from Italian Army stocks to add to the few similar guns they had from the 1910s.

The Ecuadorians had ordered some Czechoslovakian weaponry but the Italians persuaded them to cancel the contract. When the Italians entered World War II in June 1940, the remainder of their contract with Ecuador was immediately canceled.

Other weaponry purchased by the Ecuadorians since 1910 was now worn out or had been lost during civil conflicts in 1912 and during the civil war of 1913–16. Although the total strength of the Ecuadorian Army in 1941 was 700 officers and 6,800 men, few were in the war zone when fighting began. President Carlos Arroyo del Rio kept the army’s best units in the capital Quito from fear of his political opponents. In reality, even if the whole of the Ecuadorian Army had been sent to meet the Peruvians, they would have been outnumbered two-to-one. When the fighting began there was a total of 1,724 troops in El Oro province, and these were divided between a number of military posts and forts. Units in Zarumilla were the “Cayambe” Battalion with 266 men, which was assigned to defend eight military posts, and the “Montecristi” Battalion with 219 men defending nine posts. Both of these battalions had a few ZB vz. 26 light machine guns and old Maxim heavy machine guns. In addition, there was a 100-strong “Cordova” Engineers Battalion and a 71-strong artillery unit without any guns. There was also a “Machala” Company of policemen from that town who had been hastily converted into a military unit. Another 55 men from various military units were described as a reserve force and there was a battery of six Italian 65mm mountain guns. These guns had few shells and according to reports were not used in action during the 1941 fighting. They were, however, shown off as “war booty” by the victorious Peruvians at the end of the war. In addition, the Ecuadorians had a few Skoda 47mm infantry guns dating to 1908, and the strategic town of Puerto Bolivar was well defended by four Breda 20mm anti-aircraft guns manned by well-drilled crews. There was also a mixture of other old 75mm guns, including the Vickers M1901 mountain gun. In total the Ecuadorians had 32,000 rifles, but many of these were old and unserviceable in 1941. With a military budget less than 10 percent of the Peruvians’, the Ecuadorians could not expect to be able to compete on a level playing field with their foes. The Ecuadorian Air Force was small with only a handful of modern aircraft, including several Italian IMAM Ro.37 reconnaissance-attack planes. These were poorly maintained and could not fight in 1941 and no Ecuadorian planes saw combat. Other types included a handful of Curtiss Wright CW-19 and CW-16 trainers, which did see a little service in 1941, but only in the support role.

**Ecuadorian troops parade outside their barracks in the period just before the 1941 war with Peru. This rare photograph shows a variety of officer uniforms, with the other ranks wearing grey cotton shirts, trousers, and side caps. Some of the officers wear standard grey uniforms, while others have white summer uniforms. The flag carried by one officer appears to have the name of the “Machala Company” made up of militarized policemen, which took part in the Zarumilla War. (Author’s Collection)**

MADRE DE D
PUNO

**The Peruvian Army shows off its new Czechoslovakian-made CKD LTP light tanks as they train for the coming war with Ecuador. It was no secret that the Peruvians had been building up their army, navy, and air force for a number of years. Modern equipment and weaponry, including fighters, bombers, artillery, and tanks, had been purchased in the late 1930s and into the 1940s. Peru’s 15,000-strong force sent to fight the war with Ecuador had trained to use this new weaponry to good effect. (Cody Images)**

## The First Peruvian Offensive

The main theater of operations in 1941 was in the south-west of Ecuador across the border from north-western Peru. Peru’s excuse for launching their offensive into Ecuadorian territory was claimed to be an attack across the border by a unit of the Ecuadorian Army on July 5, 1941. On the other side, Ecuador said the military campaign by Peru was totally unprovoked and unjustified. Peruvian forces had been seen advancing northwards from their starting point towards the Zarumilla River since July 5. On July 6, the Peruvian artillery began bombarding the suspected positions of the Ecuadorians and NA-50 fighters strafed their trenches when they could find them. The Ecuadorians established a defense line in the path of the Peruvian Army and waited for them to reach it. Pushing ahead of the main Peruvian Army was a vanguard of about 3,000 troops, which began to make probing attacks against the Ecuadorian defenses. Because these Peruvian attacks were limited in size and the number of troops involved, the Ecuadorians were able to concentrate their limited resources flexibly against them. Whenever the Peruvians attacked, most of the available Ecuadorian troops were switched to that sector to counter them. This effort by the Ecuadorians could not be sustained for long and they knew that eventually the full force of the Peruvians would be used against their brittle defenses. By July 11, the fighting had abated and the Ecuadorians believed that the Peruvians had given up their campaign. Surprisingly the Ecuadorians had been able to hold the Peruvian advance, but this cessation of fighting was not an end to the conflict – it was merely an interlude. By July 15, there were a reported 8,000 Peruvians facing approximately 2,000 Ecuadorians. While the fighting was going on, the authorities in the Ecuadorian capital Quito were urging further resistance and promising reinforcements to the hard-pressed Ecuadorian Army. In late July they did receive 1,400 reinforcements, made up of the 590-strong “Carchi” Battalion from Quito, the “Tulcan” Battalion from Puerto Bolivar, and a 52-strong unit of black volunteers from Esmeraldas province. All these new arrivals were poorly trained and lightly armed; the black volunteers described as “macheteros” were armed only with machetes.

## The Naval Campaign

The Peruvian Navy began a total blockade of the Gulf of Guayaquil at the start of the war with two cruisers, the Almirante Grau and Coronel Bolognesi, and the destroyers Almirante Guise and Almirante Villar. The Ecuadorians recalled their only substantial ship, the Presidente Alfaro, from Panama where it was under repair, but it was not in a fit state to fight. Although the small number of gunboats of the Ecuadorian Navy tried to contest the sea with the Peruvians, they were usually totally outgunned. The only naval action of note took place on July 25, when the 1,200-ton Peruvian destroyer Alimante Villar took on the 300-ton Ecuadorian gunboat Abdon Calderon. The Ecuadorian gunboat had been escorting three ships carrying supplies to their army when they were intercepted by the Peruvian destroyer. In what the Ecuadorians claimed as a “David versus Goliath” victory, the smaller ship managed to land three or four shells on its opponent’s decks, damaging its forward gun. Whether by luck or bad seamanship by the Peruvians, the Alimante Villa was damaged and put out of action. This disputed Ecuadorian naval victory was one of the few bright spots of its war effort and was exploited to the full in its propaganda campaign.

## The Second Peruvian Offensive

On July 23, a second Peruvian offensive began with an artillery bombardment and bombing by the Peruvians’ Caproni Ca. 135 and Ca. 310 bombers. The 4,000-strong Peruvian 1st Division crossed the Zarumilla River and began an advance on a 19-mile-wide front. In support of the advance was a 12-strong armored unit, which was accompanied by motorcycle troops and truck mounted infantry. A bombardment was kept up on the Ecuadorians by 12 75mm field guns, which moved up with the rest of the division. They were facing 647

Ecuadorians, who were under constant attack from the air as bombers and fighters strafed their positions. By the 25th, the Ecuadorian defenses were broken, and the situation was not helped by the arrival of 780 reinforcements. These forces were made up of 500 poorly armed militia and 280 untrained and unreliable Carabineros. When these new arrivals were attacked by the Peruvians on the 26th, they fled from the battlefield along with some of the weary veterans of the earlier fighting. At the same time the Peruvian 8th Division was advancing in the Chira-Macara Sector in the center of the front, with 3,500 men facing only 137 Ecuadorians. By the 27th all was lost for the Ecuadorians, with only a few isolated units continuing to hold out against the overwhelming odds they faced. In other sectors a 1,000-strong Peruvian force came up against an expectedly large formation of Ecuadorians with 365 troops. This was probably the nearest that the Ecuadorians came to parity in their fighting with the Peruvians but they were still outnumbered almost three-to-one. During this period of fighting the Peruvian Navy joined in, bombarding the Ecuadorian positions on the Pacific coast.

**Peruvian motorcycle troops struggle through the mud during their “lightning” advance into the disputed Zarumilla region of Ecuador in 1941. Ecuadorian forces in the war theater were relatively small and had only a few anti-aircraft and mountain guns to counter the Peruvians. Although the Ecuadorians put up some resistance to the Peruvians, the terrain was often more of a problem than their meagre forces. All of the men are wearing the Adrian-style helmet, which had been introduced into Peruvian service in the early 1930s. (Cody Images)**

The Peruvian Army had now captured all of its objectives, including the towns of Chacras, Ranco Chico, Huaquillas, and Quebrada Seca.

## The Afternoon Blitzkrieg

The only places left to capture in El Oro province were Machala, Pasaje, Santa Rosa, Arenillas, and Puerto Bolivar in the far north-west. Peru now launched its Blitzkrieg on July 31, using airborne, armored, and motorized forces and utilizing its overwhelming air power. In the morning a motorized column had captured Arenillas as its defenders escaped into the jungle. A ground offensive began at 14.30pm with a short artillery bombardment, while bombers attacked all of the target towns and villages. A six-man-strong parachute force was then dropped over Puerto Bolivar on the 31st from a Caproni Ca. 111 bomber. Five of the men landed successfully in the drop zone and took the town from the non-existent garrison, who had withdrawn into the jungle. Ecuadorian reports said that the other paratrooper had landed in the sea and had to be rescued by local fishermen. This small airborne assault is famous as the only use of paratroopers in the history of Latin American warfare. Small units of airborne infantry were now landed at airstrips at Santa Rosa and Machala in Caproni Ca. 111 transports. At Santa Rosa five Caproni transports were involved, with troops from the 1st Battalion aboard. These units were ordered to hold their positions until the advancing motor columns could arrive. Some Peruvians were transported by sea to take on any remaining pockets of resistance. By 18.00pm all the main objectives had been reached and the Ecuadorians were retreating out of El Oro province. The 1st Division’s advance soon caught up with its advance units and they now halted rather than pursuing the defeated Ecuadorians. Within reach of the Peruvians was the major Ecuadorian port and second city of Guayaquil. Wise council ignored pleas to invade the rest of Ecuador, and the Peruvians sat on their laurels.

## The War in the North-East

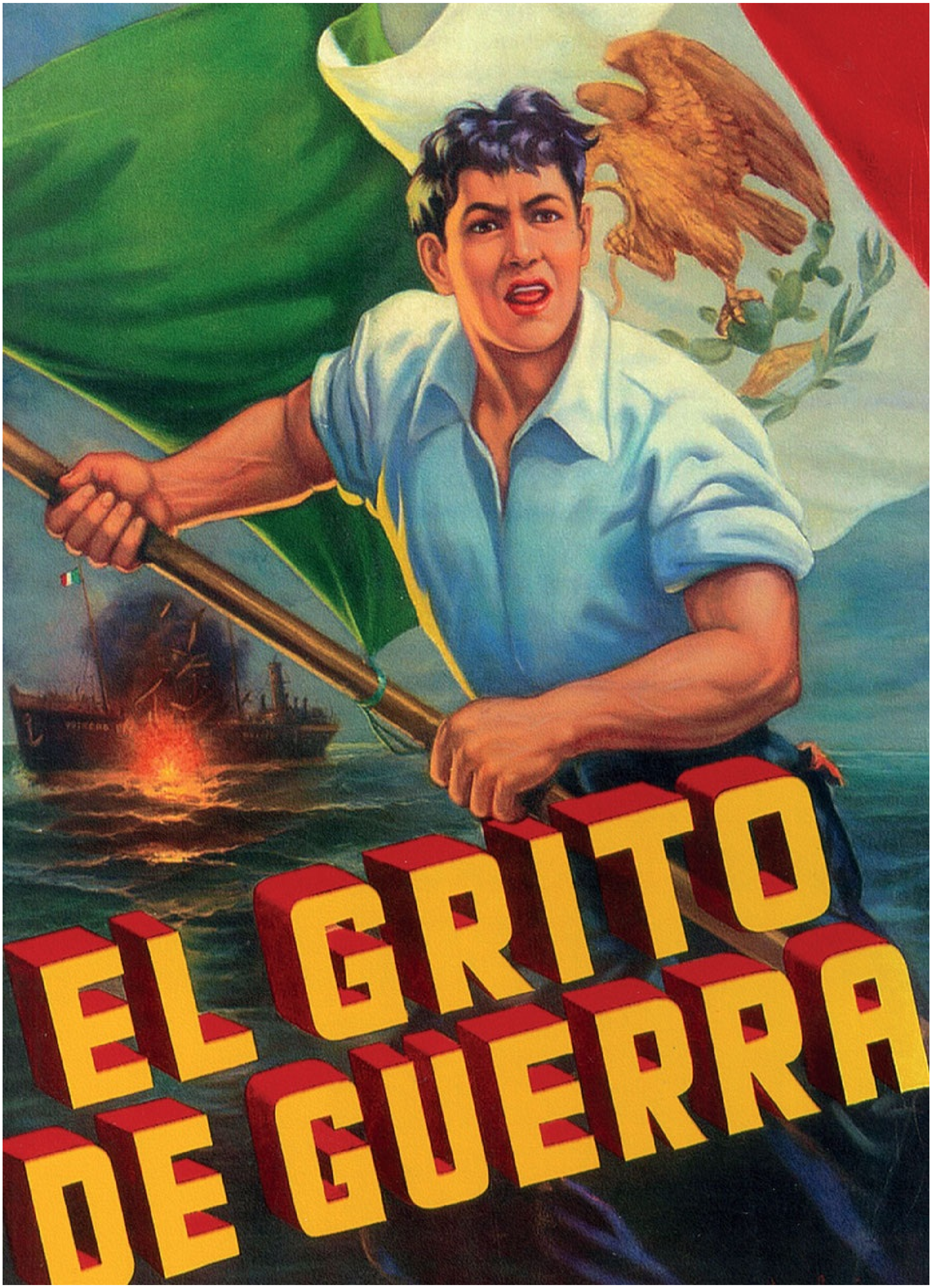
While the fighting was going on in the main war theater in the northwest, another smaller campaign was being fought in the jungles of the north-eastern Selva region. This fighting was on a much smaller scale, with the Peruvian forces only numbering 1,815 men, but initially rising to 3,911 by the end of the fighting. Opposed to them were about 724 Ecuadorians, who even after the arrival of reinforcements only reached 840 men. The main Peruvian formation involved in this side-show campaign was the 5th Division made up of three infantry battalions and an artillery group armed with elderly 75mm mountain guns. Ecuadorian forces were made up of three weak battalions, the “Ecuador,” the “Oriente,” and the “Patria.” The battalions had deployed their troops into 13 detachments of company or smaller size, with the heaviest weaponry available being a few light machine guns and two Skoda 47mm infantry guns. Peruvian forces had the advantage of the support of the Amazon river flotilla made up of six river gunboats. They also had air support from 12 planes, which were mainly older floatplanes left over from the Leticia fighting of 1932–33. Fighting had begun in the north-east in June and was to continue until at least November, months after the end of hostilities in the south-west. Although the main campaign began in late July, the largest action took place on August 11, two weeks after the official cessation of hostilities. This battle involved an attack by 314 Peruvians against the town of Rocafuerte defended by 129 Ecuadorians. The attackers had the support of eight 75mm field guns and the guns of the Peruvian gunboat Amazonas. When the town fell, the Peruvians captured the only two field pieces in the north-eastern theater along with nine ZB vz. 30 light machine guns and 171 Mauser rifles. This defeat cost the Ecuadorians a total of 11 casualties and 27 taken prisoner, while Peruvian losses were 19 killed and wounded, but a large number of Ecuadorians were reported to have drowned while trying to escape. This action virtually ended the serious fighting in the north-east, but isolated Ecuadorian units continued to fight. They suffered further defeats throughout August and into September and most Ecuadorian troops took to the jungle. From their jungle bases they continued to ambush Peruvian troops until they finally laid down their arms in November.

**Peruvian soldiers proudly hold up the captured standard of the Ecuadorian “Montecristi” Battalion at the end of the Zarumilla War. The one-sided conflict certainly raised the morale of the Peruvian Army, which had suffered a severe blow by their failure during the Leticia Incident. This conflict was one of the few which was fought during the years of World War II without any relevance to the larger conflict. (Author’s Collection)**

## The End of Fighting and the Aftermath of the War

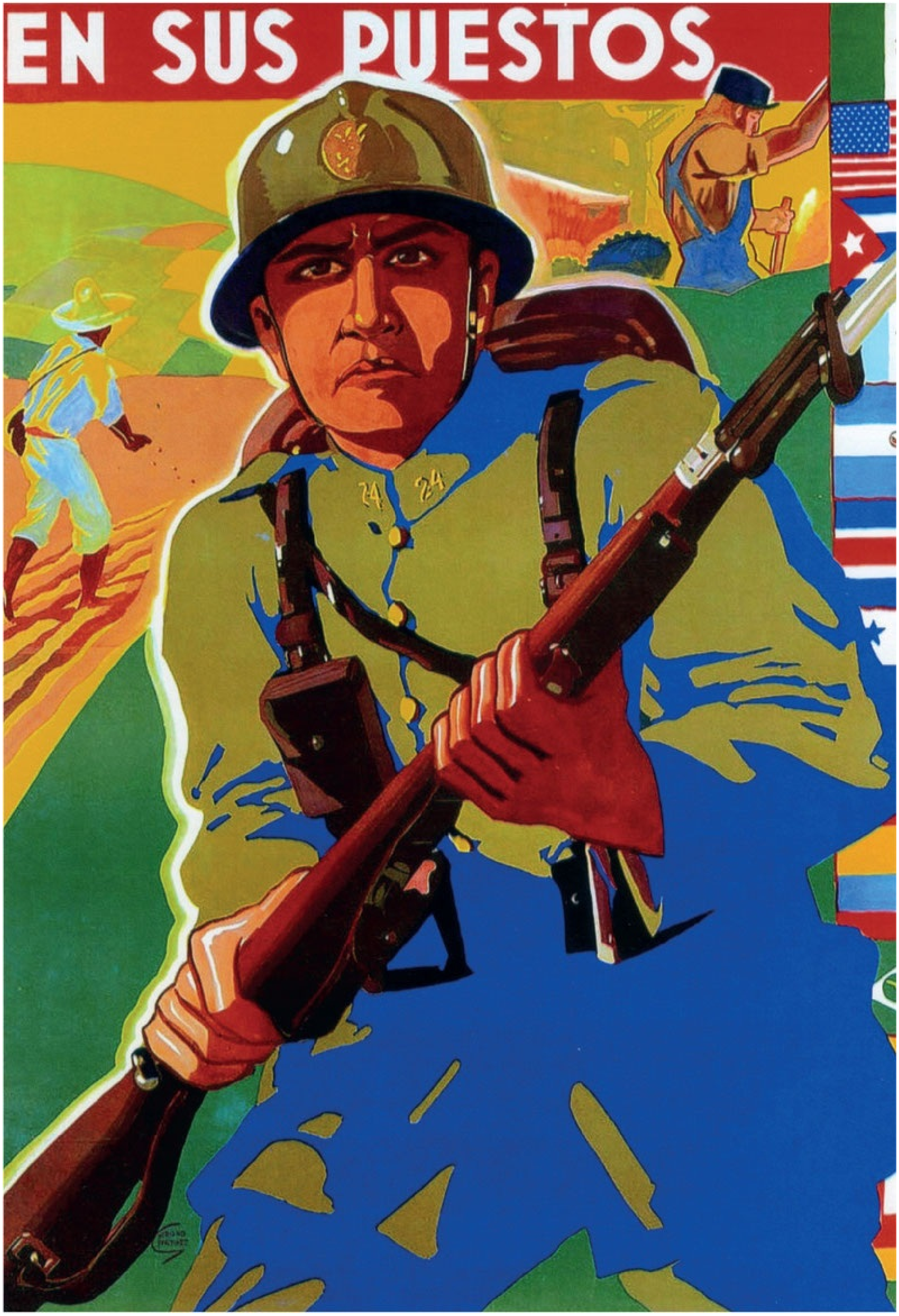
By September 1941 hostilities in the main theater of war had officially ended, with the Peruvians in control of 15,385 square miles of Ecuadorian territory. This territory included the province of El Oro and large parts of two other southern Ecuadorian provinces. After mediation led by diplomats from Argentina, Brazil, and the USA, the Peruvians were left in “temporary” control of large parts of formerly Ecuadorian land. This so-called “Protocol of Rio de Janeiro” of January 1942 was a disaster for Ecuador and was never ratified by the Congress in Quito. Ecuador was never going to accept the loss of 50 percent or 80,000 square miles of its territory and further border conflicts were to break out in 1981 and 1995. In the aftermath of the war both sides expanded their armies, with the Ecuadorians doubling theirs to 12,000 by 1942. However, the Peruvians had expanded their army during the 1941 war to almost 32,000 men. They now became the beneficiaries of a large amount of US military support and the USA encouraged them to keep their army’s strength to the wartime figure. Although Ecuador also got limited aid from the USA, the latter wanted Peru to have a strong military, as it was seen as a more viable ally in the war with the Axis Powers. Military casualties in the 1941 war were relatively light, with the Ecuadorians suffering 148 dead and 235 wounded while the Peruvians lost 84 dead and 72 wounded. The number of troops who died from disease was not recorded but sources say they were several hundred at least. Ecuadorian civilian casualties in the fighting were also not recorded, but were again estimated to have been quite heavy, as many went into the jungle to escape the Peruvian occupation.

# THE 1940s


EL GRITO
DE GUERRA

**A Mexican poster from the early 1940s shows the outrage of the people against the sinking of their country's merchant shipping by German U-boats. Its slogan, "El Grito de Guerra" or "The War Cry," and the brandishing of the Mexican flag are self-explanatory. Most Latin American countries were generally in support of the USA after December 1941. This was despite the fact that many Latin American governments were semi-fascist in character. (Cody Images)**

Like the rest of the world, Latin America was dominated by World War II and its wide-reaching consequences. Although only a handful of countries in Latin America were actively involved in the war, the fact that the USA was at war was bound to have ramifications for the region. Some countries, like Argentina, had populations which included large numbers of pro-Axis people, especially amongst the German and Italian emigrants. Although all Latin American countries declared war on the Axis Powers before their defeat in 1945, some waited until the last minute to do so. The impending victory of the Allies and the strong pro-Democracy speeches made by their leadership – especially by President Roosevelt – inspired the youth of Latin America. A student movement influenced by the politics of President Roosevelt was largely responsible for the overthrow of the dictatorship of President Ubico in Guatemala in 1944. In the same year the right-wing regime in El Salvador fell again due to a movement inspired by the Allied Powers' impending defeat of the Fascist leaders Hitler and Mussolini. Although most governments in Latin America were old-fashioned conservative rather than fascist, the defeat of the Axis Powers gave pro-democracy campaigners hope for the future. But the post-1945 period was to show that the right-wing regimes of Latin America would not accept the change that their populations yearned for.


EN SUS PUESTOS
24
24

**This Mexican poster of 1942 shows a soldier of the Federal Army and its slogan says that the military are “In Their Posts.” The poster emphasizes the readiness of Mexico to fight against tyranny with support of the Mexican people. On the right of the poster are the flags of other Latin American nations who are in support of the Allied war effort. Mexico was divided into pro-US and pro-Axis camps, with the Communist Party in favor of Nazi Germany before their attack on the Soviet Union in June 1941. There was a long-standing resentment in Mexico against the USA after the interference of the US Army and Navy there during the early 20th century. (Cody Images)**

# Latin America in World War II

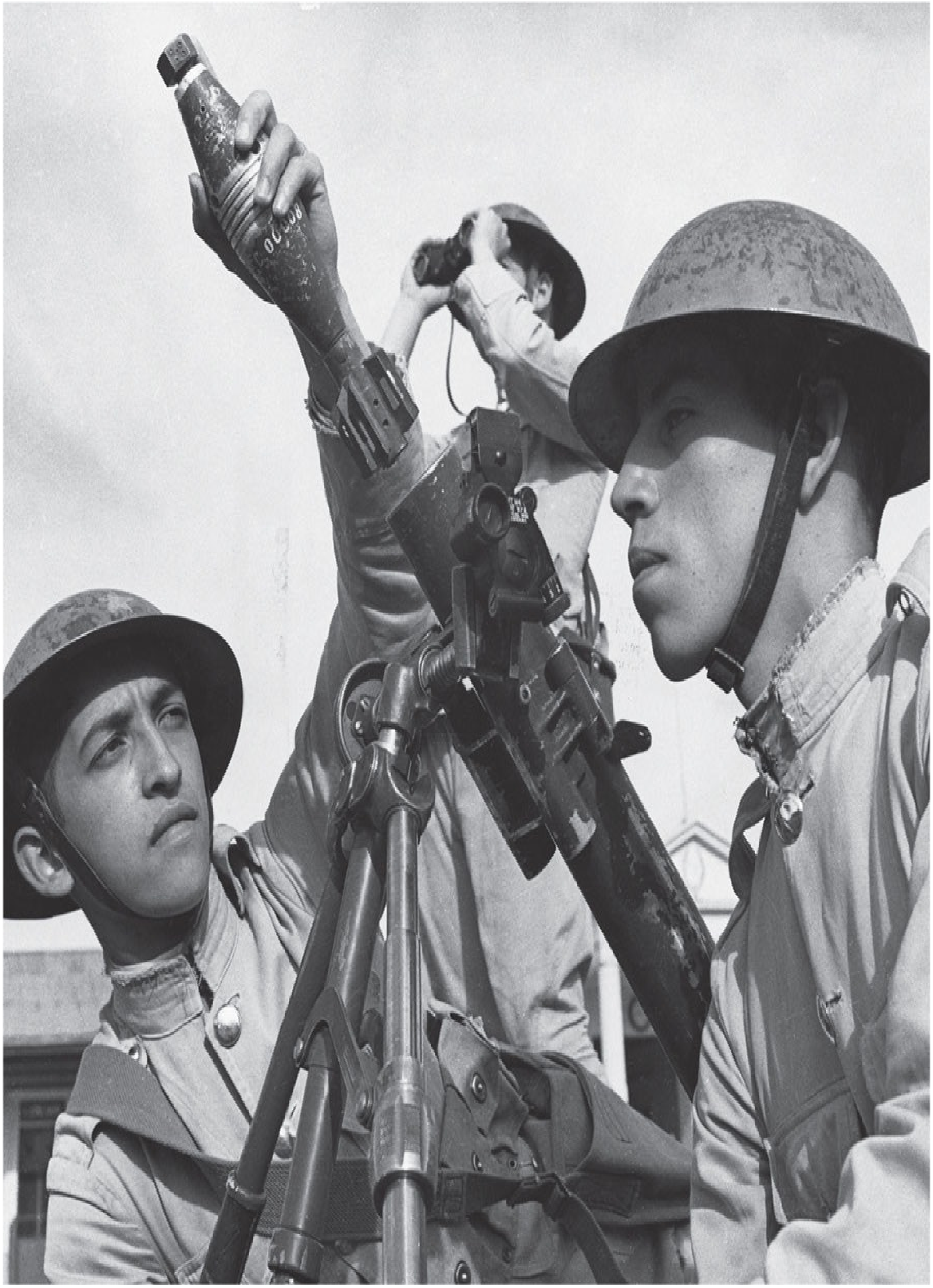
At the start of World War II in September 1939 Latin American countries largely stayed out of the conflict. The various countries had their own issues and they adopted the same isolationist attitude as their neighbors to the north in the USA. Many Latin American countries, however, had large emigrant communities from Germany and Italy, with 830,000 German-born citizens living in Brazil. Other countries with large German communities included Argentina with 60,000, Chile with 90,000, Bolivia with 8,000, and Colombia with 3,000. These figures only included the German-born immigrants, with many more second or third-generation children of 19th-century immigrants living in these countries. Brazil had a staggering 3,000,000 Italians resident there, and there were smaller groups in most Latin American countries. The loyalty of many of these German and Italian immigrants was to their homelands and some returned home to fight for their mother countries. The sympathies of the armed forces of Latin American countries were divided into pro-German and neutral, with the Argentinian Army in particular being biased toward Germany. This was not surprising, as their army had been trained by German instructors from 1915 until 1940. The Argentine Government had to rein in the pro-German enthusiasm of its army’s officers as it tried to steer a neutral path in the pre-1941 period of the war. In Peru, the French had trained its army between 1896 and 1940 and many in the officer’s ranks were pro-French. However, there was never any possibility of any Latin American nation siding with the Axis Powers, and apart from Brazil their armies stayed out of the conflict. On the face of it, Latin America should have been a fertile ground for the Fascist powers, as most countries had their own fascist parties. In Brazil were the “Integralists,” Chile had its “Nacistas,” and Peru had the Union Revolucionara Party. There were also the “Gold Shirts” in Mexico, and in Argentina the National Fascist Union based on Mussolini’s Fascist Party. Other smaller parties existed in El Salvador and Nicaragua with small memberships, but as in most countries these groups had little or no influence on their already authoritarian right-wing regimes.

**Brazilian Army CV 33II tankettes described in the original caption as “baby tanks” are seen on parade in February 1942. The men are wearing the Italian crash helmet supplied with the tanks, and the officer standing up wears the new model Brazilian uniform. Although this tank is armed with the standard twin machine guns, a special export version was supplied to Brazil with a 13.2mm Madsen gun. When Brazil declared war on the Axis Powers in August the same year its army could then call on better equipment from the USA. (Cody Images)**

The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941 saw an immediate response in support of the USA from some Latin American nations. On the 8th, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Haiti, and the Dominican Republic declared war on the Japanese Empire. The next day they were joined by Cuba, Guatemala, and Panama, while Colombia broke off relations with Japan. By the 11th of December Costa Rica, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Guatemala, and Nicaragua had declared war on Germany and Italy. They were followed on the 12th by Panama, El Salvador, Haiti, and Honduras in response to the Axis declaration of war against the USA. It was January 26, 1942 before Bolivia decided to break off relations with the Axis, with Brazil choosing to limit their actions to Japan only. On May 22 Mexico declared war on the Axis, followed on August 22 by Brazil’s declaration of war against Germany and Italy. It was April 7, 1943 before Bolivia decided to declare war against Japan, Germany, and Italy, which was expanded to include all other Axis countries like Rumania on December 4. On January 26, 1944 Argentina changed its formally neutral or pro-German stance by breaking off relations with Germany and Japan. The early months of 1945 saw other Latin American nations clamoring to declare war against the soon-to-be-defeated Axis Powers. February saw Ecuador declare war against Germany and Japan on the 2nd, with Paraguay following suit on the 8th. Peru declared war on Germany and Japan on the 13th, while Chile chose to declare war on Japan the following day. On the 16th Venezuela declared war against Germany and Japan, and Uruguay did the same on the 23rd. Argentina waited until March 27 before declaring war against the Axis Powers, and finally Brazil declared war against the Japanese Empire on June 6, 1945. On the military side, apart from the Brazilian Expeditionary Corps in Italy and the Mexican fighter squadron that served in the Pacific, Latin American nations contributed in other ways to the Allied war effort. Several Latin American air forces supported the USA in performing anti-submarine and anti-shipping missions during World War II. Chile, Argentina, Colombia, Mexico, Cuba, and Brazil operated some aircraft in patrolling the Atlantic and Pacific coasts, as well as the Caribbean after 1942.

EJERCITO
DE
GUATEMALA

**Seen in Guatemala City in 1942, this old 1920s truck has been turned into a rather ungainly anti-aircraft vehicle by the army. How useful it would be in a real war is doubtful, as the smartly turned out soldiers would be cramped trying to operate their two Browning machine guns. In the early 1940s the Guatemalan Army had a strength of 6,000 men and was short of any heavy weaponry or equipment. (Cody Images)**



Guatemalan military cadets take part in training with US-supplied mortars in the summer of 1942. Guatemala was one of the first Latin American countries to support the USA, declaring war on the Axis Powers on December 11, 1941. Like most Central American countries, Guatemala’s declaration of war against Germany, Italy, and Japan was largely symbolic. Its air force did have a handful of obsolete 1930s P-26A fighters supplied by the USA and these were joined by other US aircraft during the war in exchange for rights for US planes to use Guatemalan bases. (Photo © Hulton-Deutsch Collection/CORBIS/Corbis via Getty Images)

**Soldiers of the Argentine Army take part in field maneuvers in the early 1940s and prepare to fire their 81mm mortar. The soldiers wear the Swiss M18 steel helmet, which was worn concurrently with the German M35 model. By 1940 the army of Argentina had two armies, the 1st with four infantry divisions and the 2nd made up of two infantry divisions and two mountain detachments. Although pro-German, there was never any chance that Argentina would join the Axis, especially after the entry into the war of the USA. By the end of World War II the army had a strength of 100,000 men and was one of the largest in Latin America. (Cody Images)**

**Argentine artillerymen gather around their gun limber for a snack during the military coup of 1944. This coup was only one of several which would lead in 1946 to the rise of Colonel Juan Domingo Peron. Instead of relying on the military to take power, the “charismatic” Peron managed to gain the support and trust of the labor organizations of Argentina. He used this new power base to counter the constant military interference in politics, and would rule the country until he was overthrown in 1955. (Cody Images)**

## The Brazilian Expeditionary Corps in Italy, 1944–45

Brazil declared war on Germany and Italy on August 22, 1942 and also broke off diplomatic relations with the Japanese Empire. In January 1943 President Roosevelt of the USA and President Vargas of Brazil met in Natal. Their discussions centered on the possible contribution of Brazilian troops to the Allied war effort. It was agreed that a 300,000-strong Brazilian force would be trained and equipped by the US Army. This large force would then be deployed overseas, with the Mediterranean Theater chosen as the most appropriate for the Brazilians to fight in. A military mission was sent to North Africa to prepare the groundwork for the arrival of thousands of Brazilian troops. A Brazilian expeditionary force was formed, which during 1944–45 had a total of 26,000 men serving in its ranks. On July 16, 1944 the first Brazilian troops arrived in Italy, with the 1st Division disembarking at Naples. This was followed by four more contingents to make up the strength of the expeditionary force. By the end of September, the Brazilians were in the front line fighting as part of the US 5th Army. Although the expeditionary force arrived dressed in their own uniforms and armed with their own weapons, these were soon replaced by US items. The only way to identify the Brazilians from their American allies was by their colorful shoulder patches and their different rank insignia. The Forca Expedicionaria Brasileira (FEB) was made up of the 1st, 6th, and 11th infantry regiments, each with a strength of three battalions. There were also four artillery battalions, the 1st to 4th, an engineer battalion, a medical battalion, a reconnaissance squadron, and a signal company. In total the FEB had 23,702 other ranks and 1,539 officers. The FEB was to see a great deal of action from September 1944, fighting against German and Italians of the “puppet” Salo Republic forces in Northern Italy. They saw action at the battle of Monte Castello in the Apennine Mountains in the winter of 1944 and then in the Po Valley in the spring of 1945. Brazilian units continued to fight until the final surrender of the German Army in Italy on May 2. According to reports, the FEB fought well throughout its service in Italy and its troops were praised by their US allies. In their last action the FEB captured almost 15,000 German and Fascist Italians at Fornovo. As well as ground forces the Brazilian contributed a small air element of 500 men in two squadrons, the 1st Liaison and Observation Squadron and the 1st Fighting Squadron. The fighter squadron was trained by the US Air Force and was equipped with the latest P-47 fighters. Its 48 pilots were frustrated by their lack of air combat and only shot down two enemy aircraft and destroyed seven on the ground during their service. However, in the ground-attack role they achieved good results, destroying 250 rail wagons, 25 bridges, 85 artillery positions, 31 fuel depots, and 1,304 vehicles. They lost a total of 15 P-47s during these missions and by the end of the war only had 22 fit pilots available, having lost nine killed. Losses of Brazilian ground troops during their service in Italy were reported to be 443 killed and a similar number wounded. The surviving Brazilians were soon repatriated back to Brazil after the end of hostilities, with the last ship full of FEB soldiers sailing from Italy on September 19, 1945.

**A line of Argentinean tanks is seen during a parade in the center of Buenos Aries in the early 1940s. They are British Cardon-Lloyd M1934 light tanks, which were already obsolete when 12 of them were purchased in 1938. Because of Argentina’s neutrality, these tanks would not see any action apart from during the various coups d’état in the 1930s and 1940s. (Cody Images)**

BRASIL

**The “Smoking Cobra” shoulder insignia of the Brazilian 1st Expeditionary Division in Italy in 1944–45 came in several similar designs. They were made by local Italian workshops and so varied slightly in their design and quality. The original arm badge of the Brazilians in Italy was a plain green khaki shield with the word “Brazil” across the top. (Author’s Collection)**

**The officer in the center of the photograph pointing out a target to his men is Brigadier-General Euclydes Zenobio da Costa. He was assistant divisional commander of the Brazilian Expeditionary Corps in Italy in 1944–45. The 25,334 Brazilian troops arrived in Italy in July 1944 ready to join the US 5th Army of General Clark. Once they had become acclimatized they went into their first action on September 6, 1944, and performed creditably during their service in Italy. They were joined by two Brazilian Air Force squadrons of US-supplied aircraft, one of fighters and one of reconnaissance planes. (Cody Images)**

## The Mexican Air Force in the Pacific, 1945

In April 1941 the Mexican and US governments had signed agreements that meant that they could use each other’s air bases and military installations if necessary. The Mexican payback for this rather one-sided agreement was the USA’s offer to help train some of their units and in particular their air units. When Mexico declared war on the Axis Powers in May 1942, it began to receive substantial amounts of armaments from the USA. Mexico was motivated to declare war on the Axis because of the large amount of its merchant fleet that had been sunk by German U-Boats. Suggestions that the Mexican Army might fight alongside the US Army were never seriously discussed, although it was agreed that the Mexican Air Force might have a role to play. In 1944, Mexican flying and ground crews of the Fuerza Aerea Mexicanas or FAM were sent to Texas for advanced training. At the same time the FAM was separated from the Mexican Army as a distinct branch of the armed forces for the first time. An elite squadron, the Escaudron de Pelea 201, was formed in July 1944 under the command of Colonel Antonio Cardenas Rodriquez. By early 1945 the 201st Squadron had been equipped with 25 of the latest Republic P-47D fighters. To gain some battle experience, the squadron was transported to Clark Field on the island of Luzon in the Philippines. Before they traveled to the Philippines, the Mexican unit was given the new designation “Fuerza Aerea Expedicionara Mexicana” or FAEM. Colonel Cardenas retained overall command of the FAEM and a Captain Radames Gaxiola Andrade was given command of the 201st. They left San Francisco on March 27, and arrived at Luzon on April 30, where the squadron was incorporated into the USAAF 58th Fighter Group. After a period of assimilation, the 201st was ready to go into combat and served until the end of the war in the Pacific in August 1945. Flying its first combat missions on June 4, the 201st flew a total of 785 mainly ground-attack missions against the Japanese, losing seven pilots. At the end of the war the grateful US did not have the facilities to take the 201st and its remaining 17 P-47s back to Mexico. Instead they took the remaining Mexican planes back into US service and transferred 25 new P-47s across the border to be flown by their pilots when they returned to Mexico in November. After landing in California, the personnel of the 201st traveled by special train to Mexico. As they traveled towards the border, they received a hero’s welcome at every station until they crossed into Mexico.

1

**Four pilots of the Mexican 201st Squadron pose in front of one of their Republic P-47 Thunderbolt fighters in the Philippines in 1945. The 201 Escaudron fought alongside the US Air Force during the liberation of the Philippines, starting off with surplus ex-US aircraft. Later in the campaign they received brand new Thunderbolts and flew them until the final defeat of Japan in August 1945. (Library of Congress)**

**A Mexican soldier poses in 1941 at the time of the forming of a joint US–Mexican Defense Commission in the aftermath of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. This allowed the US to use strategic air bases on the Mexican coast, and in return Mexico began to receive arms shipments. The 56,000-strong Mexican Army received large amounts of modern artillery and unwanted CTMS light tanks made in the USA but not used by their armored units. US aircraft also began to arrive in Mexico after they declared war on the Axis Powers on May 29, 1942. (Library of Congress)**

## The Paraguayan Civil War – The “Barefoot Revolution” 1947

In the years following the end of the Chaco War in 1935, Paraguay had been ruled by the usual Latin American procession of presidents. The hero of the Chaco War Jose Estigarribia was president in September 1940 when he was tragically killed in a plane crash. Estigarribia was a brilliant military commander but he was not a shrewd politician, and had named War Minister Higinio Moringo as his successor. Moringo suspended the country’s constitution and ruled Paraguay as a dictator, using shifting alliances with the military and right-wing politicians. The new president was faced by opposition from the workers and students who objected to his rule but for six years he ignored their strikes and protests. He had come to power proclaiming that he would restore “Order, Discipline and Hierachy” to the country. When he came to power, he reimposed the death penalty, clamped down on any civil disobedience, and conscripted any workers who went on strike into the army. Other measures included the censoring of the press and banned public assemblies and meetings. When the Allied Powers were victorious in 1945, he realized that he would have to tone down some of his policies. At the same time, he had to dismiss some of the more pro-Nazi military officers from the army. By 1946 he realized he would have to make some concessions, and legalized limited political activity. He formed a cabinet with two political parties, the Colorado Party and the so-called Febreristas, the latter taking their name from the revolution of 1936. The short-lived coalition fell apart in January 1947 when the Febreristas left it claiming that the Colorados were being favored by Morinigo. Disgruntled Febreristas now formed an uneasy alliance with the Paraguayan Liberal and Communist parties and looked for military means to counter the government. The anti-Morinigo alliance was led by Febrerista Party leader and former president Rafael Franco. Franco, a longtime opponent of Moringo and hero of the Chaco War, had returned from exile in late 1946. Moringo's coalition government soon collapsed and his cabinet resigned, and the various parties jockeyed for power, with a civil conflict an inevitable outcome.

Franco's supporters organized a failed coup in the capital Asuncion in early March 1947 but this did not deter the rebels, who were gathering their strength throughout Paraguay. To the north of the capital the 2nd Infantry Division revolted and was joined by most of the troops who were in garrisons in the Chaco. Many of these soldiers were veterans of the Chaco War and were willing to support Franco as their former commander. The rebels established their HQ at Concepcion 134 miles north of the capital, while Moringo Loyalists held the capital. A stalemate now developed, with undecided units of the army waiting for the two rivals' next move before they joined one party or the other. In mid-April the revolt spread to areas east and south-east of the capital, with artillery units totaling 2,500 men rebelling at Paraguari, 30 miles to the south-east of Asuncion. Franco's rebels had a major boost when, on April 27, the Paraguayan Navy joined the revolution and began to shell Asuncion. Unfortunately for the rebels, the two most powerful vessels in the navy, the gunboats Paraguay and Humaita, were in Argentina undergoing repairs. Some of the other smaller ships of the navy tried to move up to the capital but were forced to withdraw up-river when the loyal Artillery Division fired at their gunboats.

**“Pynandi” or “barefoot” militia are seen resting during the Paraguayan Revolution of 1947, when they fought on the side of the government. The men are wearing typical paramilitary dress and only a few of them are armed with Mauser rifles. Many Paraguayans on both sides during the revolution were armed with leftovers from the expansion of the army during the Chaco War of 1932–35. (Author’s Collection)**

At the start of the war the Paraguayan Army had a strength of 5,850 men and these were organized into 11 divisions. Franco could call on the loyalty of about 2,000 troops close to the capital as well as armed supporters of the Febrerista Party. He gained the support of four of the 11 army divisions and two divisions stationed in the Chaco Boreal. He also had the support of the navy, but its ships were split up and the two gunboats were 570 miles away in Argentina. The troops from the Chaco who supported him were hundreds of miles away in the desert, while his other main body of troops was to the north of Asuncion. Moringo could call on three infantry divisions, three cavalry divisions, and the important artillery division, which was armed with WWII-era US field guns. He was short of officers, however, as it was reported that 80 percent of them had gone over to the rebels. What he did have was the backing of a 20,000-strong “Pynandi” or “barefoot” militia recruited from the lower classes. This militia force had been organized largely by the Colorado Party, the only political group which supported the president. These volunteers were armed mainly with weapons left over from the Chaco War, although Moringo had been sold some US M1 Garand rifles in 1947. He had also been given a large number of German MP 40 sub-machine guns by the USA, which were issued to his irregulars. The fact that many of the working-class people of Paraguay supported the government gave the conflict the rather bizarre alternative title of the “Barefoot Revolution.” Moringo called on the support of the USA and Brazil to put down the rebellion and emphasized the supposed Communist sympathies of the rebels to both countries. They turned down his pleas for modern arms, but it was reported that President Peron of Argentina did send some small arms. Peron also sent two of his navy’s ships, the minesweepers ASA Granville and ASA Drummond, to Asuncion to help defend the capital if necessary.

Paraguay had built up its air force in the late 1930s with the import of a large number of Italian aircraft. They bought seven Fiat CR.30 and CR.32 fighters, ten ground-attack planes, three Breda Ba.65s, seven Caproni A.P.1s, and a handful of Breda trainers. During World War II they were given 70 trainers by the USA – 48 AT-6 Texans, 12 Vultee BT-13As, and ten Stimson PT-17s. These planes were poorly maintained in the years after delivery and few of the Italian planes were serviceable in 1947.

## The Air War in 1947

The air force in 1947 was split almost down the middle between Loyalists and rebels and their 31 US aircraft. None of the aircraft from the Chaco War were still in service, and all the planes from the 1932–35 war had been taken out of service due to wear and tear and lack of spare parts. The Italian planes delivered from 1938 to 1939 were also not serviceable at the start of the war, as they had been mothballed. All the combat aircraft available to both sides came from the US planes delivered under Lend Lease in World War II. The PT-17s, BT-13As, and AT-6s were converted into improvised ground-attack planes, with their co-pilots throwing mortar shells by hand at the enemy. At the start of the war the rebel air force's trainers were reported to be more effective, but the Loyalists improved their performance as the war progressed. The Loyalists were able to get a few of their Italian Caproni A.P.1 attack planes into the air eventually and they flew bombing missions. Most air missions were ground attacks but a few dogfights did take place, although no aircraft were shot down during them. Some aircraft were lost to anti-aircraft fire, probably from the 20mm guns captured by the Paraguayans from the Bolivians during the Chaco War. To identify each side's planes, the Loyalists had a tricolor flash on their fuselages, while the rebels had a large black "V" painted on theirs.

A few biplanes were used during the war, which was the last time that this kind of plane was used in combat.

## The Ground Fighting

Fighting between the two forces began again in late April when the navy yards in Asuncion held by the rebels were attacked by Loyalists. The naval personnel defended their HQ but were forced after a few days to flee the capital on April 29. Some escaped on the steamer Pratt Gill, but their ship was bombed by Loyalist BT-13As and its crew had to beach it. In early May a government offensive towards the rebel base at Concepcion was halted by the height of the Ypane River. Loyalist forces now dug in and waited for the river to fall and moved up reinforcements from Asuncion ready for the renewed advance. Meanwhile, the crews of the two gunboats Paraguay and Humaita still stuck in Argentina argued about whether to give their support to the rebels. On May 7, following fighting between Loyalist officers and rebel crewmen, the two ships were secured for the rebel cause and left Argentina. In their haste to leave the repair yards the crews had left most of their weapons behind, and soon discovered the rifles on board their boats were useless. Instead of sailing up the River Plate to Paraguay, they stopped at a port in Uruguay and tried to buy new weaponry. Using their own funds, the crews managed to buy on the black market a handful of machine guns and 100 rifles, all in bad condition. After two months of waiting to join the figh,t the two gunboats entered Paraguayan waters on July 10. Waiting for them was Loyalist artillery commanded by Lieutenant-Colonel Alfredo Stroessner*. Stroessner, who was in command of Loyalist forces in southern Paraguay, ordered air attacks by BT-13As on the gunboats, and they were both put out of action until repairs could be done to them. The loss of the two powerful ships was a major blow to the rebel cause, which was now threatened by a government offensive towards Concepcion. Before the Loyalist force could get to the rebel headquarters, Franco and his military command decided to strike at the capital and began organizing a force on July 29. A naval flotilla was put together using any available river boat to transport a 3,000-strong force to Asuncion. With a total of 37 boats, including three armed steamers, the flotilla was under the command of navy Lieutenant-Commander Martinez. He had armed the steamers with 75mm field guns and some of the other ships with mortars and heavy machine guns. As the rebel fleet left Concepcion on July 31, the Loyalist army was entering the port, but the two forces did not engage in battle. At the same time the rebels' aircraft were all destroyed on the ground by the Loyalists' improvised bombers, giving the government forces full control of the air. The rebel fleet's plan was to sail up river to Asuncion pushing aside any Loyalist ground forces and the government's small fleet. This fleet consisted of a gunboat – the Colonel Martinez – and an armed tug – the Neembucu. A rebel unit, the 1st Regiment, was sent to secure the river port of La Caida, which allowed the flotilla to get within range of the two Loyalist ships. The two mismatched fleets made contact at Puerto Milagro and the two Loyalist ships were quickly captured. As the rebel ships sailed onwards, they came under increasing attack from Loyalist aircraft and their crews and the troops aboard suffered heavy casualties. By August 2, the flotilla had reached Puerto Ybapobo, and after taking it from the Loyalists, they disembarked their remaining 2,700 troops. The rebels were now joined by a small cavalry unit and were ready to advance on Asuncion 32 miles to the south. Bad planning by the rebel command meant that their troops were, however, running low on ammunition. They did defeat several attacks by small Loyalist units, but lack of ammunition had now become a major issue. An attempt to fly in arms and ammunition from Uruguay ended in the transport seaplane crashing. As the rebels prepared to march on Asuncion, the two repaired gunboats Paraguay and Humaita were ready to return to the war and began to sail up the Paraguay River. They were again met by Stroessner’s well-directed artillery fire, and after heavy fighting the two gunboats retired back towards Argentina. This news did not help the already faltering morale of the rebels, who had decided to abandon the 36 remaining ships of their naval flotilla at Puerto Copacar on August 18. These ships were immediately taken over by Loyalist sailors sent from Asuncion for that purpose and were sailed back to the capital. The rebels now lost heart and their leaders escaped to Argentina by plane and boat leaving their troops behind them. Rank and file rebels were given an amnesty, but many preferred to leave the country and settle in Argentina.

**For the first half of the 20th century, most Central American nations as well as Cuba, Haiti, and the Dominican Republic were ruled for long periods by right-wing dictators.**

**These dictators and their regimes were often opposed by Liberal and left-wing rebels who tried to overthrow them, often with tragic results. After World War II the ordinary people of the region were looking for a way to break this cycle of military dictatorships. A military means to rid Central America as well as the Dominican Republic and Haiti of the dictators developed into the Ejercito de Liberacion de America or ELA in 1946. A group of idealists got together to form the ELA as an international force that would support any movements looking to rebel against any of the region's dictators. It was formed by General Juan Rodriquez Garcia, a Dominican Republic exile, with most volunteers coming from amongst the exiled Dominican community. Many had fled the dictatorship of Trujillo and some ended up fighting for the USA during World War II. They were joined by Cubans and other volunteers who had seen service in the US Armed Forces between 1942 and 1945. Quite a few had been pilots who still had a taste for adventure and did not want to return to their home countries. Amongst the ELA's volunteers was future Cuban revolutionary leader Fidel Castro, who got some of his early military training in its ranks. The Legion got materiel and financial support from Batista's Cuba, Guatemala, and Costa Rica. The most important element of the ELA was its air arm, which eventually had a strength of 22 aircraft of all types. These were nearly all ex-US Air Force surplus aircraft and included a full squadron of war surplus P-38 Lightning fighters. With the grand title of "Fuerza Aerea del Ejercito del La Revolucion Americana" or FAERA, the air force was allowed to station its planes on Cuban air bases. The long-term aim of some of the ELA's leadership, with Guatemalan President Juan Jose Arevalo's support, was to form a Central American Federation. One reason that Central American nations were under perpetual dictatorships was the small size of their populations. This allowed relatively weak armies to dominate them, and the leaders of the ELA thought that if the peoples of the region united, no dictator would be powerful enough to subdue them. Any tin-pot dictator who tried to stop the building of this federation was to be**

**dealt with by the ELA with the support of the local revolutionaries. The ELA reached a strength of 700 men in the late 1940s and participated in a number of anti-right-wing campaigns. As the ELA, its ground forces took part in the invasion of the Dominican Republic in 1947. In 1948 it fought under the title “Ejercito de Liberation de Costa Rica” and took part in the civil war there between March and April. After its success in Costa Rica it was finally given the title by which its commonly known, the Caribbean Legion, and took part in the invasion of the Dominican Republic in 1949. By 1949 the Legion had outlived its usefulness and the lack of regional support meant it had to relocate its air force to Guatemala. The idealism on which the Caribbean Legion had been built was not enough to sustain it in the harsh political climate it now faced in Central America, and it collapsed.**

Although the military forces involved in the war were relatively small, the total number of dead in 1947 is often quoted at 20,000. Some estimates put the number of casualties at 55,000, but these figures may well be exaggerated. What is known is that the upheaval caused by the civil war/revolution saw a third of the population leaving Paraguay.

Many thousands of Paraguayans could not live under Moringo’s rule any longer and went into temporary exile. In June 1948, President General Higinio Morinigo was overthrown in a bloodless coup. The next year, in February 1949, yet another coup saw his successor, Natalicio Gonzalez, kicked out of office and replaced by General Rolon.

## “Overthrow the Monster” – The Invasions of the Dominican Republic 1947–49

The Caribbean nation the Dominican Republic had been dominated by the USA for the first few decades of the 20th century. During its occupation of the country the US had established a national army, and by 1930 this was commanded by

Rafael Leonidas Trujillo. He had risen from being a cadet to general in command of the National Army in an astonishing nine years. Trujillo and his co-conspirator Rafael Estrella Urena decided in 1930 to overthrow the government of President Vasquez. When Urena attacked the capital, Trujillo called off his troops and allowed the rebel army to take it over without a fight. When an election was called later the same year, Trujillo, with the agreement of Urena, was one of the presidential candidates. All his political rivals were intimidated into standing down and Trujillo got 99 percent of the vote. It did not take long for Trujillo to exhibit all the usual traits of a Latin American despot and during his rule over 50,000 people were killed. One of the worst atrocities of his time in power took place in 1937 when he ordered the massacre of refugees from neighboring Haiti. During the chaos of throwing the refugees back across the border, Trujillo’s troops killed an estimated 12,000–35,000 Haitians. By 1941 opposition to Trujillo was growing, and saw the establishment of the Dominican Revolutionary Party in exile. During the early and mid-1940s, the DRP began planning an invasion of the Dominican Republic to overthrow Trujillo.

**Officers of the Cuban Army chat with the crew of a Marmon-Herrington CTM-ITBI light tank from the USA in 1942. This tank would go on to serve the amy of President Batista until 1959. Although poorly armed with a 37mm gun, this type was supplied to Ecuador, Guatemala, and Mexico besides Cuba during the 1940s. (Cody Images)**

In 1947 the time was finally ripe for a rebel invasion and left wingers began to gather arms and ammunition on friendly Cuban territory. Trujillo knew about their plans and claimed that “Communist Revolutionaries” from Cuba, Venezuela, Guatemala, and Puerto Rico were behind the plot. President Ramon Grau of Cuba gave the 3,000 rebels until July 30 to leave the country and launch their invasion of their homeland. Under the grand title of the “Ejercito de Liberacion de America” or ELA, the rebels gathered arms and aircraft as well as ex-US Navy landing craft. The aircraft in their rebel air force were four P-38 fighters, two aged P-35 fighters, two C-47 transports, and two Lockheed Vega Ventura bombers, as well as a single B-24 Liberator heavy bomber. All the planes were to be flown by American pilots and they began looking around for bomb racks, machine guns, and other weapons to arm the demilitarized aircraft. All the bombers were seized by the increasing impatient Cuban Army, which also confiscated 13 trucks full of small arms owned by the rebels. Although the rebels managed to buy a B-25 bomber, they could not replace the army surplus rifles and machine guns. Pressure built on the ELA to leave Cuba, while their volunteers spent most of the time sleeping on the beaches at their Cayo Confites base. By early October it was obvious that the invasion was not going to take place and the ELA quietly disbanded. Even if it had gone ahead, Trujillo and his 15,000-strong army were ready and waiting for them to land. Following the failed 1947 invasion of Trujillo’s Dominican Republic, another even more farcical attempt was made by a small group of exiles two years later. This time the invading force was only 60 men strong and these men were trained in Guatemala. They secretly got basic training at Guatemalan military bases and also received permission to use Mexican airfields to refuel their planes, which were to land the volunteers in the Dominican Republic. The invasion was a disaster, with a combination of poor organization and bad weather meaning that only a fraction of the already tiny invasion force landed. In total a paltry 15 men were landed at the town of Luperon, where the Dominican Republican Army soon surrounded them. All of the revolutionaries were either wounded or killed and the invasion was largely ignored by Trujillo, who had grown accustomed to attempts to overthrow him.

## The Costa Rican Civil War 1948

The 44-day-long Costa Rican Civil War was triggered by the disputed result of the general election to the Congress in early February 1948. Although the opposition candidate, Otilio Ulate Blanco, claimed victory, it was disputed by the Republican Party leader, Rafael Angel Calderon Guardia. Blanco said he had received the most votes, but a fire in the high school where votes had been stored called the result into question. The ruling Congress annulled the election results and the outraged Blanco and his supporters decided to take up arms in protest. When the fighting began on March 12, the two factions had attracted the support of other political groups and parties. On the government or Constitutionalist side were the small Costa Rican Army and armed supporters of Rafael Calderon, who were known as the “Calderonists.” They also had the support of the Costa Rican Communist Party or “Vanguard Popular,” some of whose supporters were armed and formed a brigade. Government forces also had a small mobile unit, which was equipped with a single Bren Gun carrier, two ex-US White scout cars, and 14 machine gun-armed jeeps under the command of Colonel Risoberto Pacheco. The popular colonel’s death in the early fighting affected the government troops’ morale badly. However, the relatively well-armed government militia still held the advantage with a strong force of 2,000 men. They also had the advantage of a small air arm, with three light civilian planes used as improvised bombers. In the countryside the government could also call on the support of the rural militia known as the “Mariachis.” On the rebel side were 1,200 men divided between the ELN or National Liberation Army under the command of Jose Figueres Ferrer and the supporters of Otilio Ulate Blanco known as the “Ulatistas.” Figueres’ and Blanco’s troops were distinguished from the government side by a large “V” worn on the hat or helmet by most rebel soldiers. Arms were in short supply on both sides during the civil war, with the Constitutionalists having the advantage of 24 Thompson sub-machine guns with adequate ammunition. Most of the other small arms were old rifles – 3,000 Mausers and 1,000 50-year-old Remingtons along with 300 assorted sub-machine guns and 65 mostly out-of-date machine guns. Heavier weaponry used by the warring factions included eight 75mm Skoda mountain guns and four Italian Breda 20mm anti-aircraft guns. The rebels had a few 81mm mortars, along with any artillery they could capture from the government stocks. Besides the White Scout cars in use with the mobile unit there appears to have been at least five armored tractors in use. These were building excavators with an armored sub-structure added to the drivers cab with firing points for rifles or machine guns.

**Government-supporting militia from the countryside known affectionately as the “Mariachis” march through a Costa Rican town in December 1948. After the victory of their political leader Jose Figueros in the civil war earlier in the year, he had been made provisional president. He soon faced opposition in the form of an invasion from neighboring Nicaragua by a small force of his political rivals. They had been forced into exile when they were defeated in the 44-day-long civil war. These peasant soldiers still owe loyalty to Figueros, and have been hastily issued with rifles from the military stores and sent with little training to face the invaders. (Cody Images)**

## The March Fighting

Fighting began on March 12, when farmer turned militia commander Jose Figueres led 30 rebels to seize the town of San Isidoro del General. When his men entered the town, they found three Douglas DC-3 transports on the tarmac of the town’s airfield and quickly captured them. Two of these planes were then flown to Guatemala for the rebels by some volunteer pilots who were only part way through their training. Their mission was to pick up arms stored there for the rebels, and they returned the next day with 700 rifles and a few machine guns. They also brought with them seven Dominican volunteers who wanted to join the rebels. Figueres, who had become a prominent rebel leader, now used these new weapons to fortify the mountain town of Santa Maria de Dota, which was on the road from San Isidoro and the capital. Any government offensive would travel along this road and Figueres hoped to defeat them if they came. A few days later a 100-strong government force did advance tentatively down the road towards Santa Maria, but were heavily defeated. The Picado government was about to receive their own aid from abroad when a 300-strong force of Nicaraguans landed on the Pacific coast on March 20. They had been raised by Nicaraguan General Enrique Somarribas and a Dominican communist from amongst the unemployed banana workers. This poorly trained but enthusiastic force marched 41 miles to San Isidoro, which they took from the rebels after two days of fighting. In another attempt to bolster the Picado government, 500 Nicaraguan National Guards invaded the Costa Rican border region on the 20th. At the same time President Somoza offered to send 1,000 National Guardsmen by air to the Costa Rican capital, but President Picado declined the offer. International condemnation of the action by the Nicaraguans led to the withdrawal of any National Guardsmen on the 31st.

## The Air War

Both sides in the civil war had a handful of WWII-era aircraft, with the rebels having already captured a few DC-3s in March. President Picado tried to put together some kind of air force and used a few a few old Vultee BT-13 trainers and at least one remaining DC-3.

This improvised air force flew a few missions against the rebels but the lack of proper weaponry and bomb racks made their efforts very limited. The rebellion was a golden opportunity for the Caribbean Legion to involve themselves in a “just cause.” They sent at least three DC-3 transport planes to support the rebels that could be used as improvised bombers. These same aircraft were used to transport 80 Caribbean Legion fighters to take the town of Port Limon. The taking of Port Limon was the first time that airmobile troops were landed into a war in the Western Hemisphere. A rebel DC-3 also made a bombing raid on the presidential compound in San Jose but it failed in its attempt to kill the president.

## The April Campaign

By early April the rebel army had grown to 700 men who were ready to go on the offensive against the demoralized government troops. On April 11, Figueres used two of his captured DC-3s to airlift 80 of his more reliable troops to the airfield of the town of Puerto Limon. This town was close to the important town of Cartago, which was the next objective of the rebel army. His 600 troops then traveled overnight through the bush from Puerto Limon and captured Cartago at dawn. By April 13, Figueres and his rebel army had taken the majority of Costa Rica and were preparing to move against the capital. In the meantime, his troops had taken the towns of Tarbaca and San Ignacio de Acosta. The main opposition to this offensive would be the Communist Party’s “Labor Brigades,” who still supported the president. These well-armed troops would have been a major problem for the rebels if Figueres had not bribed their leader Manual Mora. Figueres agreed not to interfere with their labor rights when he came to power and Mora was happy to stand back and allow the rebels to advance on San Jose. In the capital President Picado was becoming increasingly desperate as his supporters began to desert him. On April 16, he pleaded with President Somoza in Nicaragua for help, and his ally immediately sent 500 well-trained National Guard into the Costa Rican border region. He also ordered a 100-strong force to be airlifted to Villa Quesada over 100 miles into Costa Rican territory. This interference by Somoza did not help Picado, however, whose last loyal troops were now fighting for control of San Isidoro. By April 19, the battle for the city of San Isidorio del General was over as effectively was the war. President Picado hastily signed the Pact of the Mexican Embassy and fled to his friend Somoza in Nicaragua. The rebels, with Figueres at their head, entered San Jose on April 27, ending the civil war. The fighting had cost a staggering 2,000 lives, which was a high figure when one sees how few combatants there were, and many of these deaths were amongst the civilian population. Figueres and Ulate could easily now have taken power without a electoral mandate, but instead made a pact for the future of Costa Rica. This allowed Figueres to control the country for 18 months under the rule of a temporary junta. At the end of that term a free election would be held with the result respected by all factions. After that date Ulate would take office as the legitimate presidential “victor” from the February 1948 election. In the meantime, Figueres had to face the challenge from his neighbor and regional rival President Somoza.

## The Aftermath

In December 1948, only a few months after his victory, Figueres and his junta were to face a threat to his government from the unforgiving President Somoza. On the 9th a 150–300-strong invasion force entered north-western Costa Rica and captured the town of La Cruz defended by 20 government troops. The timing of the invasion was quite inconvenient, as Figueres had disbanded his army only ten days before. However, there were about 1,000 pro-junta volunteers being trained by instructors from the Caribbean Legion just in case they were needed. The invaders were supporters of the former president, Rafael Calderon, who had not given up on regaining power. Figueres seemed untroubled by the whole affair, and his spokesman said, “Our trouble is not to contain the so-called rebels. Our real problem is to keep thousands of men from rushing to the border to repel them.” The invaders had been trained by the Nicaraguan National Guard since Figueres’ victory, with 1,000 reported to be ready by December to invade Costa Rica. The small force in the north-west proved to be only the vanguard of a larger rebel force that landed at the port of Liberia. The National Guard may have trained and armed the rebels but they did not follow them across the border. Although the rebels, went on over the next few days to capture several “deserted” villages around Liberia, they soon lost heart. International pressure saw the invaders retire back across the border and Figueres was also forced to stop allowing the Caribbean Legion to use Costa Rica as a base. In February 1949 a truce was agreed between the two sides, but this was only to hold for six years (see Chapter 11).

**Peruvian troops are being sent to put down an uprising by supporters of the People’s Party in the port of Callao in early October 1948. The revolt was against the presidency of Jose Luis Bustamente, who the People’s Party had supported when he ran for office in 1945. The uprising was supported by a Peruvian Navy mutiny and Bustamente was then replaced by an army officer, General Manuel Odria, a hero of the Zarumilla War of 1941. (Cody Images)**

## “La Violencia” – Colombia 1948–58

Since the late 19th century the large South American country of Colombia had been deeply divided politically between liberal and conservative parties. In 1948 the 17 million people of Colombia were often born into support of one party or the other, and political affiliation was tribal. Different towns, cities, and regions shared the same political loyalties, with the capital Bogota being almost totally liberal and the next biggest city Medillin being conservative. People were born into supporting one or other of the political parties and nothing could sway them from these traditional loyalties. Class surprisingly did not play a part in these loyalties, with both the Liberals and the Conservatives drawing support from all classes. In 1946 a Conservative candidate won the National Election, largely due to a split in the Liberal Party. After the election of President Ospina a new leader of the re-united Liberal Party emerged, Joreg Gaitan, a renowned orator. In a system similar to the US model, the Conservatives had won the presidency but the Liberals controlled the Congress. The new president formed a coalition but the government was hardly able to function, as the two parties could not agree on anything. Throughout 1947 and early 1948 the politicians fell out over every conceivable issue and strikes and riots became the norm. Things took a turn for the worse when on April 9, 1948, Joreg Gaitan was shot and later died of his wounds. Gaitan’s popularity with so many Colombians was hard to exaggerate and his death caused a shock on the scale of that caused by the assassination of John F. Kennedy in 1963.

**During the clampdown on civil unrest in the Colombian capital Bogota in 1948, a soldier wearing an old German World War I-era M16 helmet searches wary civilians. During the ten years of constant and bitter civil conflict from 1948 to 1958 known as “La Violencia,” the Colombian Army had to adapt its role to meet the new challenges it faced. It had to develop from a conventional army into a largely counter-insurgency force combating large guerrilla armies in jungles and mountains. Special counter insurgency schools were set up and the first Latin American Special Forces unit, the “Lanceros,” was raised. The army also had to expand its numbers substantially to face the guerrilla threat, with 50,000 regular troops plus thousands of paramilitaries in service by the mid-1950s. (Cody Images)**

## Violence Begins

Immediately after Gaitan’s death, rioting broke out in Bogota on a massive scale, with thousands of Liberal supporters looking for revenge. The mob attacked the presidential palace and other government buildings, searching for Conservative politicians to kill. It took the intervention of the army with tanks to subdue the crowds but not before a large number of people estimated at 2,000 were killed and 20,000 injured. A state of siege had been declared by the government, and once some calm had been returned to the capital, Liberal politicians were welcomed into the government and a coalition was formed. Out in the countryside, however, the traditional enmities between Liberal and Conservative supporters reached a new level. The only way that this rivalry was going to be settled was by military means and both parties began preparing for the inevitable showdown. Although the fighting in the countryside had already begun by 1949, a general election was still held that year. Laureno Gomez, the Conservative candidate, was elected president unopposed, as the Liberal Party refused to put up a candidate. They had already decided to continue their guerrilla campaign, as they no longer trusted the Colombian political system.

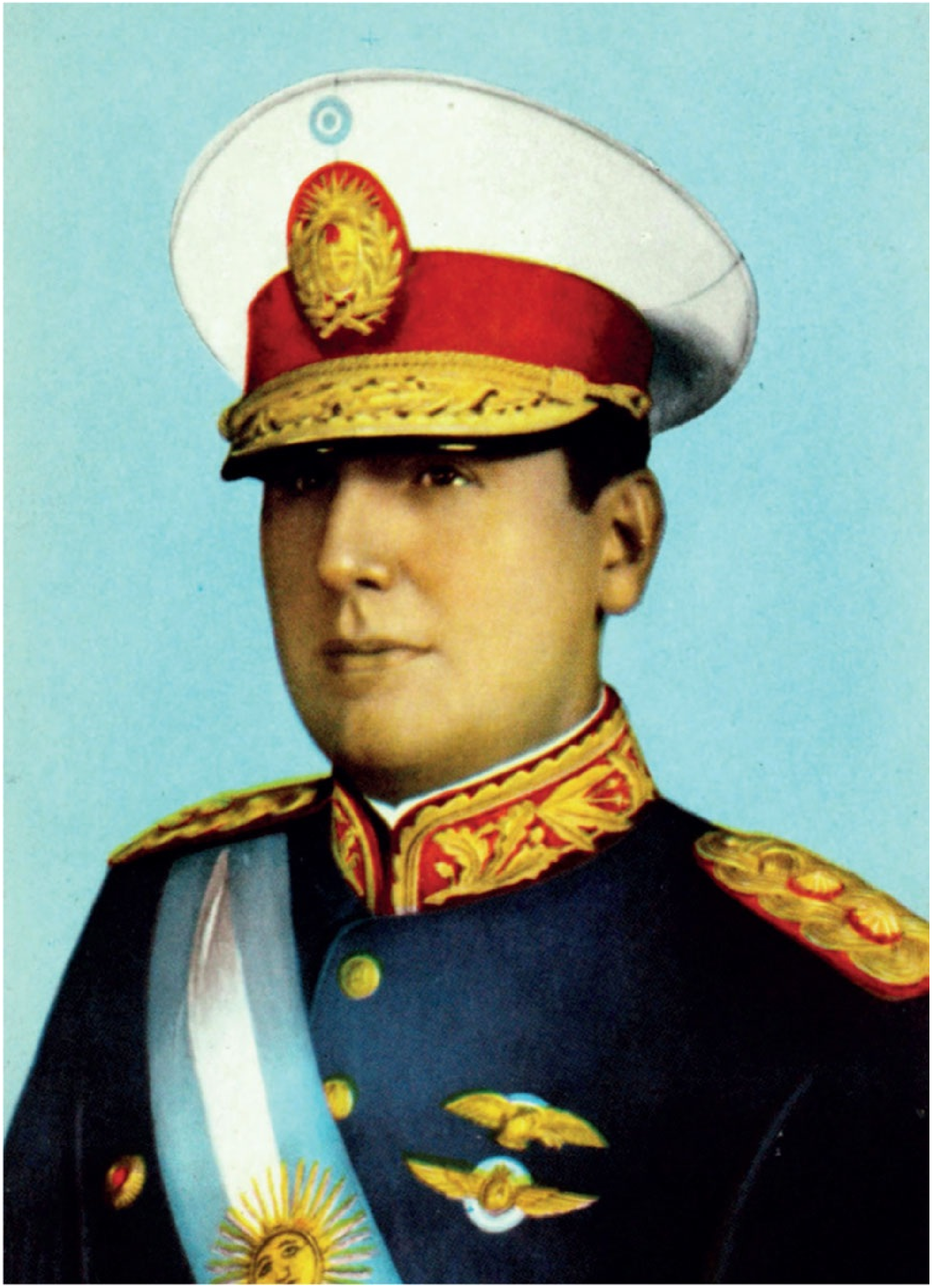
## The Military Campaign 1948–58

In 1948, at the start of the civil conflict, the army was largely conservative, although some junior officers were liberal. The army, national police, and other security forces were joined during the ten-year-long civil conflict by a number of paramilitary forces. These included most famously the so-called “Guerrillas of Peace,” formed from members of the Conservative Party. Colombia’s army was weak in 1948, with only about 15,000 men, but during La Violencia its strength rose to 50,000 men. Many of these new recruits were formed into counter-insurgency units with the new 7th and 8th brigades both getting special training. A dedicated anti-insurgency unit, the “Battalion of Lancers,” was also formed to deal with the guerrilla threat. The government could also call on a well-armed police force, which had a strength of 14,000 in 1948. By the end of the civil war the police had risen to about 25,000 with 5,000 irregulars attached. The Conservative paramilitaries had a peak strength of 12,000 men, but this is probably a slight underestimation. Throughout the insurgency the air force, which had been expanded in 1947 with new US aircraft, flew bombing raids against Liberal and Communist jungle encampments. It was equipped with 35 Republic P-47 fighters as well as three B-17 Flying Fortresses and three B-25 bombers.

The Liberals had raised a large number of guerrillas, who operated in bands of up to about a thousand strong, with an initial strength of 4,500 fighters. They were trained by pro-Liberal army officers and supplied with arms captured from state armories or handed over by sympathetic troops. Alongside the guerrillas were the “Bandoleros,” Colombian bandits who had plagued the countryside for decades. Although not always on good terms, the Liberals and the Bandoleros were at least united in their hatred of the Conservatives. In addition, the Colombian Communist Party formed its own armed groups that officially were allied with the Liberal guerrilla groups.

**Volunteers of the Liberal guerrilla army are on parade during their long-running war with the Colombian Government between 1946 and 1958. The sheer scale of the violence during this period of Colombian history is staggering, with thousands upon thousands killed. Army counter-insurgency operations against the rebels resulted in the deaths of many pro-Liberal civilians and were met with revenge attacks by the guerrillas on pro-government towns. These guerrillas are a mixture of infantry and mounted soldiers – cavalry played a vital role in both Liberal and government operations. (Cody Images)**

By 1950 the Liberal guerrillas who had established a base in the tropical grasslands of the eastern Llanos region launched an anti-government offensive. This was easily defeated and was followed by large scale sweeps by the Colombian Army, as they were determined to keep them isolated in their jungle bases. The effects of these offensives on the ordinary people acted as a “recruiting sergeant” for the Liberals and led to an expansion of their forces. In the meantime, an attempt to strike a peace deal failed and the army began an offensive into the Llanos region that destroyed several guerrilla bases. By 1952 the Liberal guerrillas had reached a peak strength of 26,000 men and they were now capable of large-scale offensives. From attacks on isolated guard posts and poorly defended villages, they now attacked and occupied towns with substantial garrisons. They were particularly keen to destroy any Conservative paramilitaries in their area and a bitter war was fought between the two irregular forces. In August 1952 a conference of all the anti-government guerrilla groups took place in a jungle village, where the Liberals, Communists, and other smaller groups coordinated their future actions. For the next few years guerrilla warfare dominated vast regions of Colombia, with the majority of the fighting for the government side done by the Guerrillas of Peace. In 1953 a newly elected government under President Gustavo Rojas tried to end the fighting by offering 6,500 Liberal guerrillas a general amnesty. At first the election of Rojas hardened guerrilla attitudes but by September a total of 10,000 guerrillas had laid down their arms. They were led into surrender by one of the foremost guerrilla commanders, Guadelope Sacedo, who had had enough. The surrender of large numbers of guerrillas affectively ended the main military phase of the violence, but it did not end the killing.



**General Juan Domingo Peron (1895–1974) was the dominant political figure in Argentina in the late 1940s and early 1950s. As a young army lieutenant, he was involved in the 1930 military coup and also in the 1943 military takeover. In 1946 he was elected president, serving until his overthrow in 1955 with the help of his supporters, the “Shirtless Ones.” Until her death from cancer in 1952 he also benefited from his marriage to his popular and glamorous second wife, Eva, who became a worldwide celebrity in the late 1940s. (Photo by Bob Thomas/Popperfoto/Getty Images)**

## The Political Events

Whilst the fighting in the countryside of Colombia had been going on, some Colombian politicians had been trying to find a political solution to the chaos. In 1953 the Gomez government fell when he decided to replace his army commander-in-chief, General Gustavo Rojas. Rojas had the support of the army, as well as the support of many moderate Conservatives and the Church. Gomez was seen as encouraging the violence to continue and was overthrown by Rojas in a bloodless coup. Rojas tried for the next few years to forge a peace between the Liberals and Conservatives and offered the guerrillas an amnesty. His constant meddling in this process and his attempts at creating a fascist state on the lines of the Peron government in Argentina saw his popularity disappear. In May 1957 he was replaced by a military junta, which in turn tried to stop the low-level fighting still going on in the Colombian countryside. The continued violence involved diehard guerrilla groups and large numbers of Bandoleros who plagued the rural areas of the country. Efforts at forming a “National Front” including Liberals and Conservatives began in 1956, and by the time of the 1958 general election it was ready to take power. It included politicians like ex-president Gomez, who had agreed to let another politician, the Liberal Alberto Lleras Camargo, stand for president. Lleras was duly elected and began to introduce policies to end all fighting in the Colombian countryside. These included amnesties for guerrillas, paramilitaries, and Bandoleros of all political persuasions. At the same time the Colombian Army’s garrisons in the countryside were strengthened as relative peace returned to the country.

## The Cost

During La Violencia an estimated 200,000 Colombians died, with the vast majority being innocent civilians. Deaths amongst the guerrillas were claimed to be 5,000 Conservative and between 15,000 and 19,000 Liberals. Army deaths were estimated at 7,200, which meant that all the combatants suffered proportionately high casualties. In addition, an estimated 2,000,000 Colombian peasants were forced to flee from the war-torn countryside to the relative safety of the big cities. This in turn caused food shortages in the cities when there were not enough agricultural workers to tend the crops. The movement of large numbers of the rural population of the country into the slums of the big cities also broke their traditional ties with the church. In the aftermath of the upheaval caused by La Violencia, the liberal/left-wing tendency in Colombia changed direction. Many young Liberals, Communists, and other radicals joined the number of guerrilla groups being formed, with the dominant one being the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia or FARC. This group was to dominate large regions of Colombia into the 21st century and their struggle with the state was to lead to decades of further violence.

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* Alfredo Stroessner was to become Parguayan president in 1954, ruling the country for 35 years until 1989.

# THE 1950s

**Colombian soldiers share cigarettes during a break from the fighting in the bleak hills of Korea in 1952. The Colombians gained a good reputation during their service in Korea and were regarded as the best foreign contingent next to the redoubtable Turks. They took their own band with them and had some of the strictest rules of all the troops in Korea – for instance, fines were issued for being unshaven and for not writing home regularly enough. They killed over 700 of the enemy and lost 131 of their own men in action. (Cody Images)**

During the 1950s the economic situation in Latin America varied greatly from country to country, but generally the expected improvement in living standards did not materialize. However, some economists describe the 1950s as the "Golden Age" for Latin America, and some nations – like Mexico and Venezuela – did indeed flourish, even though the latter country was under a dictatorship. Other countries, like Chile and Argentina, suffered from economic stagnation due often to the chaotic political situation they faced in the late 1940s and 1950s. World politics had changed greatly since 1945 with the growth in liberation movements in Colonial Africa and particular in Asia. These movements began to move towards gaining independence from their colonial powers. Left-wing groups in Latin America were given hope that political pressure might enable them to gain democracy, and proved to others that the establishment could be overthrown by political and military pressure. Latin America's right-wing regimes were still dominant and continued to receive a high level of support from the USA. The Cold War between the USA and the Soviet Union meant that any hint of communist activity in Latin America was seen as a threat to the USA "on its doorstep." The 1950s was to see the emergence of a real revolutionary force on the island of Cuba, whose success would be a game changer for politics in Latin America.

## "Fight for Independence" – The Puerto Rican Uprising 1950

The Caribbean island of Puerto Rico had been “liberated” from Spanish colonial rule after the US victory in the Spanish–American War of 1898. Puerto Rico had been annexed by the United States and its people had to settle for the reality of losing one colonial master and gaining another. The island had been ruled initially by a military government but came under civilian rule in 1900 in the form of a governor appointed by the US president. In 1917 Puerto Ricans became US citizens, but their government stayed in the same form until 1946. That year President Truman decided that the role of governor would be chosen by an election, and in 1948 Luis Munoz Marin was the first to be elected to that office. Many Puerto Ricans were not happy with this form of semi-independence and calls for full independence became louder. By the mid-1940s there were several political parties in Puerto Rico fighting for independence by different means. The Independence Party believed in trying to gain it though democratic means, while the Nationalist Party believed in armed revolution. The Nationalist leader, Dr Pedro Albizu Campos, had returned from exile in 1947, having been convicted of trying the overthrow the government in 1937 and serving six years in a US jail. As soon as he returned, he began a campaign to liberate Puerto Rico by military means and formed a “secret” Liberation Army or Ejercito Libertator. Plans by US politicians to change the political set-up in Puerto Rico were being discussed by early 1950 with the intention of giving the people of the island a vote on the introduction of a constitution. This was not good enough for the Nationalists, who did not want to wait until the planned referendum of 1951 to be given halfhearted self-government. Campos made several speeches calling for action against the Marin administration as soon as possible. He said that the people should arm themselves with “revolvers, rifles, guns, shotguns, knives and daggers to defend the cause of revolution.”

**Puerto Rican National Guardsmen arrest women and children suspected of supporting the Nationalist uprising of October 1950. The uprising was defeated in a few days by local armed police and the US-trained National Guard. Nationalist Ejercito Libertador fighters were mainly armed with small arms stolen or captured from the police at the start of the uprising. Their only hope was to put up enough resistance that their cause gained international recognition and support. (Cody Images)**

The push for independence had reached a crisis point, with the frustrated Nationalist Party now openly planning to start an uprising against the USA. There was little or no secrecy within the Nationalist Party and the authorities would have been well aware of their plans. From May 1948 the local Insular Police had had an Internal Security Unit that watched any political parties carefully. The Nationalists had been stockpiling arms and ammunition throughout the country, and on October 27, a series of raids were launched by the police on its members. Arms were found in the car of one of the Nationalist leaders and several raids resulted in shoot-outs between the Nationalists and police. Dr Campos now ordered the Ejercito Libertator to begin their attacks against the government and its forces at 12.00 noon on October 30. His plan was to start uprisings in a number of towns simultaneously, hoping to overwhelm the limited resources of the governor. The insurrection, however, began on the 28th when a Nationalist raid on the main prison freed 112 prisoners. This was intended as a distraction, and one of the inmates knew where some caches of arms were hidden. Leaders of the inmates had promised the Nationalists that up to 1,000 of their men would soon join the rebellion. This promise was not kept and the caches of badly needed arms were never uncovered by the inmate. Regardless of these setbacks uprisings were begun in a number of Puerto Rican towns, but these were usually launched by a handful of Nationalists, who were usually quickly arrested by the police or National Guard. In the capital San Juan the Nationalist Party headquarters was attacked by armed police and defended by the leader Campos and his female bodyguard along with a few followers. They had to surrender when their ammunition ran out and were all marched off to jail while the fighting away from the capital continued. The Nationalist leadership had chosen the town of Utuado as the HQ for the rebellion, as its mountainous location would allow the Ejercito Libertator to resist for a month at least. They hoped that the world would take notice of their resistance and that the United Nations might intercede on their behalf. However, when they attempted to storm the town on the 30th they were defeated by a combined force of Insular Police and National Guardsmen. They were forced to surrender that night after being holed up in a few houses during the day with few weapons. The most serious revolt of the 1950 uprising took place at the mountain town of Jayuya on the 30th, when a female Nationalist leader, Blanca Canales, led armed supporters into its center. They attacked the police station, killing one policeman and wounding three others before the rest surrendered. Their captured rifles and pistols gave the rebels' limited arsenal a much-needed boost, and the town was secured and the "illegal" Puerto Rican flag flown from a hotel. Rebels then burned down the post office and police station as symbols of oppression by the USA. Ejercito Libertator numbers were few, but they held the town for three days waiting for the government reaction. It came in the form of air attacks on the town by P-47 fighters of the National Guard Air Arm and shelling by artillery, which destroyed part of the town. In the USA the fighting was played down as being a local Puerto Rican affair and its details were kept out of the press. The US military did not want to get involved and trusted the local military to deal with the rebels, but they did hand over substantial amounts of ammunition to the National Guard. On the ground a company of National Guardsmen had surrounded the town and were preparing to storm it. Nationalist orders for the defenders to go to Utuado to join other rebels could not be followed, as there were no motor vehicles available and the roads were guarded by the National Guard. A few Nationalists took to the hills, but on hearing of the surrender of their leader they came down to surrender on November 2.

The uprising was regarded outside Puerto Rico as a "local" dispute and the US made sure that it did not become a major international news story. US acknowledgement of the fighting lamented the unnecessary loss of life and blamed the uprising on a tiny minority of normally law-abiding Puerto Ricans. They claimed that support for the uprising came from half of one percent of the population. In the era of the Cold War it was easy for the authorities to blame the uprising on the work of Communist agitators in the rebel ranks. Puerto Rican Governor Munoz Marin was quick to make that analogy, claiming that Campos and his followers were Communists. Casualties during the fighting were 18 Nationalists killed and 11 wounded and seven policemen and a single National Guardsman also killed along with a fireman and two civilians. Also wounded were 21 policemen and 11 National Guardsmen, meaning the uprising was far from bloodless, as some claimed. On June 4, 1951 the Puerto Rican people voted by a large majority to accept the provisions of the new constitution. The constitution of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico came into effect on July 25, 1952. According to the Puerto Rican and US governments, the island was no longer a colony and the USA had ceased to be a colonial power. To this day the politicians of Puerto Rico continue to argue about the true status of the island and some still call for the independence of their homeland. Others accept that Puerto Rico had benefited from its close relationship with the USA and are happy with the status quo.

## The Bolivian Revolution 1952

In the aftermath of the World War II Bolivia faced a series of crises caused by the abject poverty of the vast majority of its population. Ordinary Bolivians were not seeing any benefit from the profits made by foreign countries, which were exploiting its limited natural resources. In July 1946 the military dictator Colonel Villarroel had been ousted by a popular movement with the backing of many in the Bolivian Army. His palace, which was defended by a few loyal policemen, had been stormed by 5,000 men, who found the dictator wounded from an earlier gun battle. They carried him to the balcony and threw him down into the street, where he was finished off with a bullet. To add to his humiliation his body was hung from a lamp post with an army boot under its arm to symbolize his dependence on the military. Although popular uprisings like this might be temporarily successful, the ruling elite of countries like Bolivia played the long game.

By 1950 the ruling classes in Bolivia had managed to regain power and had purged the army and the air forces of their younger idealistic officers. Most of these officers had been exiled along with any politicians who were deemed to be Liberal and therefore political undesirables. In 1951, despite

**The Guatemalan president, Jacabo Arbenz Guzman, makes a speech during his first year in office in 1951. Arbenz was a reformist who tried to change the mindset of the Central American country. He wanted to help the poor with land distribution and trade union rights and was even willing to tolerate the existence of a communist party. None of these policies could be countenanced by the rich families of Guatemala, the powerful fruit companies, or the USA. The USA started supporting right-wing opponents of Arbenz in 1953 and organized the coup/revolution against him the following year. (Cody Images)**

the pressure from the establishment, a general election saw the victory of the left-wing Movimento Nacional Revolucionara or MNR. The MNR victory was not recognized by the outgoing president, General Urrio Lagoitia, and he chose a group of officers to take charge. This junta under the leadership of General Hugo Ballivan was never going to accept the victory of the MNR “Communists.” The junta had hidden weaknesses, however, with two of its members being secretly sympathetic to the MNR. These men were General Vargas, the commander of the police in the main city La Paz, and Chief of Police Donato Millan. Between them the two men controlled 2,000 armed police in La Paz, who could be used by the MNR in the expected military clash. As 1952 dawned the MNR began organizing a militia, which was recruited largely from tin miners. These tough workers had a secret weapon – the dynamite and other explosives they used on a daily basis down the mines. On April 6, 1952 General Vargas’ sympathies for the MNR were revealed and he was dismissed from the junta and from his command of the La Paz Police. If the MNR and their supporters did not strike against the junta immediately, they would lose the support of the well-armed police. So, on April 9, the revolutionaries took control of the state-controlled radio and announced their victory. Vargas still had the loyalty of his police, who soon took control of the city from the few troops stationed there. Meanwhile junta Loyalist, General Humberta Torres Ortiz, secretly left La Paz to go and raise loyal troops outside the city. It was soon reported that Ortiz was on his way back to the city with 8,000 regular troops, and some in the MNR panicked. They suffered a major setback when they opened the state arsenal and found it empty of the weapons they needed to expand the militia. The two turncoats, Millan and Vargas, now lost heart and took refuge in the Chilean Embassy in La Paz. The reality was that when Ortiz’s troops arrived in the city, they were mainly young raw recruits who were no match for the miners or police. Fighting for the city was described as being “savage” but many soldiers had no stomach for it. Some troops changed allegiance to the MNR side, which they showed by turning their peaked caps backwards. Others were approached by the women who worked in the city’s market, who literally took the rifles out of the young soldiers’ hands. After three days of fighting the MNR and their supporters were victorious and any junta Loyalists retreated from the city. Although the two MNR leaders during the fighting, Hernan Siles Zuazo and Juan Lechin, could now have taken power for themselves, they chose instead to bring back the victor of the 1951 elections, Victor Paz Estenssoro. Before he could come to claim his presidency, the MNR leaders in La Paz started to introduce some radical policies. One of their first acts was to make the militias raised during the revolution the main defense force for the country. They organized three separate militia forces raised from the miners, the factory workers, and the peasantry. The army, which was seen by the new government as an instrument of the ruling classes, was decimated with purges which left 25 percent of the regulars sent home. MNR leaders then ordered the virtual shut down of the army and air force, with barracks, armories, and air bases being locked up. This state of affairs was to last until 1964 as the country had an MNR government for the next 12 years. For most of this period the president was Victor Paz Estenssoro, who served two terms, 1952–56 and then 1960–64. In between Bolivia was officially under the presidency of one of Paz’s stooges, who ruled the country in his stead.

## Colombian Participation in the Korean War 1951–53

Colombia decided to support the United Nations in its conflict in Korea in the early 1950s and sent a number of units to fight there. In total 4,314 Colombians from the 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th battalions served in Korea, suffering heavy casualties during the war. A total of 146 Colombians were killed during the war, 448 were wounded, and 69 were missing in action. They fought, according to reports, with great bravery, winning two US Legion of Merit Medals, 18 Silver Stars, 25 Bronze Stars with Valor bars, and nine Bronze Stars. The battalions were rotated throughout their participation in the war, with the 1st Battalion arriving in Korea in June 1951. It was assigned to serve with the 7th Division of the US Army and was then replaced by the 2nd Battalion in July 1952, before being replaced by the 3rd Battalion in November that year. During its service the 3rd Battalion took part in the fifth battle for control of Old Baldy Hill between the 23rd and 26th of March. They were overrun by the Chinese Communist 117th Division but the Battalion fought well, losing 95 killed and 97 wounded. Colombian troops inflicted an estimated 750 casualties on the attacking Chinese before being withdrawn from the line. In June 1953 the last unit, the 4th Battalion, relieved the 3rd, which was sent back to Colombia to recover.

## The Guatemalan Revolution 1954

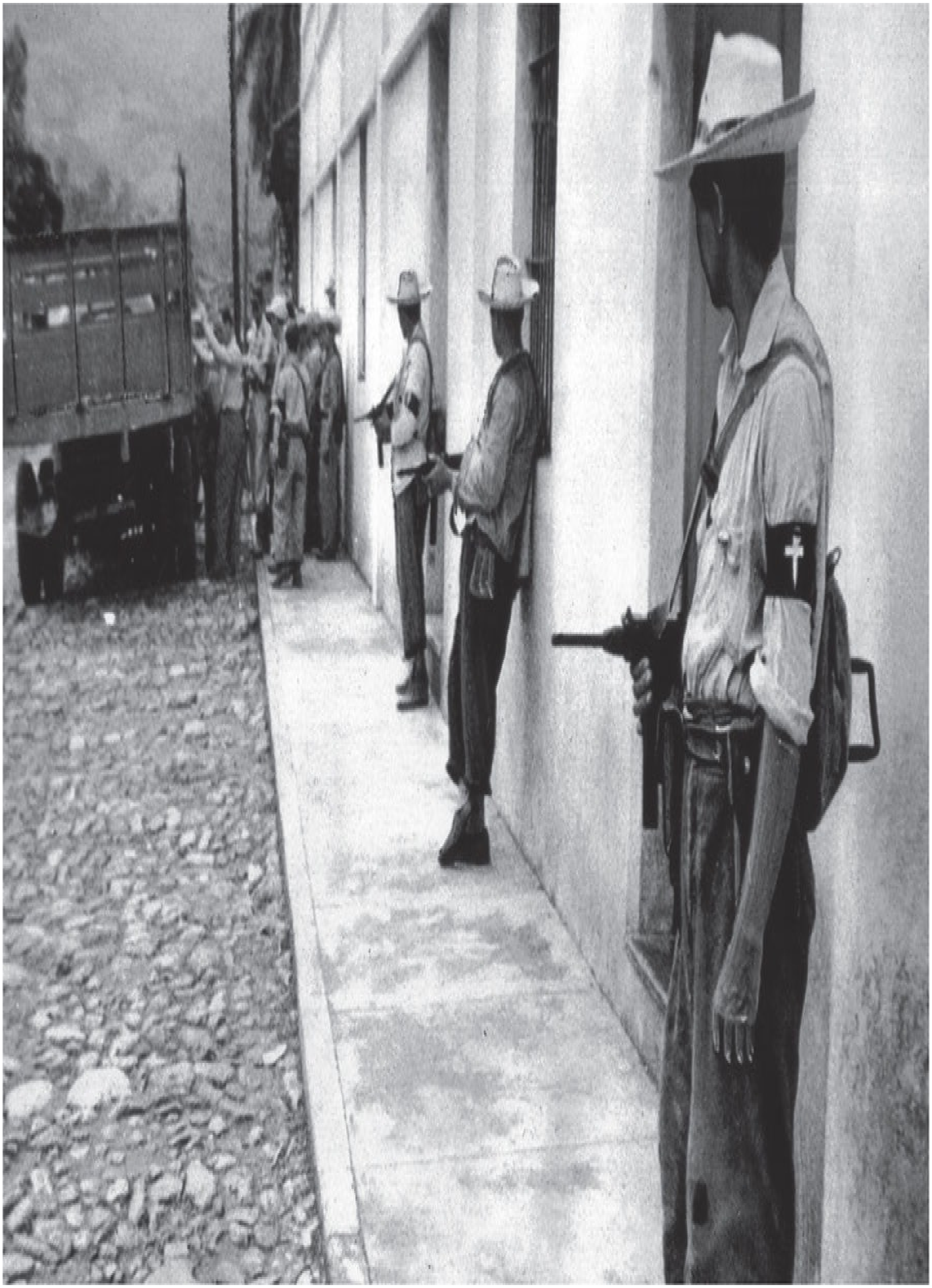
In 1944 a coup brought to power a three-man junta in the Central American nation of Guatemala. The coup overthrew President Juan Federico Ponce, who had been the chosen successor to the long-standing General Jorge Ubico. Ubico had ruled Guatemala since 1931 as a typical Latin American despot, but had, during his 13 years in power, done some good things. Gestures had been made to the Indian majority and the economy had grown substantial under his rule. In 1944 he had resigned in the aftermath of a crippling strike, having seen the writing on the wall for his regime. President Ponce had been in power for a few months when the coup was launched against his government. The junta that now controlled Guatemala was made up three men, Colonel Arbenz Guzman, Colonel Francisco Arana, and the civilian Jorge Toriello. These men officially handed over power to a politician, Juan Jose Arevalo, in March 1945, who tried to introduce reforms. His hands were largely tied by the fact that the three junta leaders were still effectively in control of the country. In 1949 the more conservative of the three leaders, Arana, was killed and power now shifted to the other military man, Arbenz Guzman. He was elected in 1951 and showed his true sympathies by introducing more radical policies than Arevala. These included land reform and controls of foreign companies, which alarmed the USA and its business leaders who had invested heavily in Guatemala. Arbenz also gave trade union rights to workers, which especially affected the United Fruit Company. His land reform policy was quite radical, with 1,000,000 acres of land being distributed to 100,000 families over a two-year period. This kind of egalitarian policy could not be allowed to go unchallenged, especially if it affected the major banana companies with their US links. Arbenz also upset the Conservatives within Guatemala and even more crucially the Guatemalan Army. He was not unaware of the wolves that were circling around his beleaguered government and tried to strengthen his position in the early 1950s. In an attempt to build his own power base, he tried without success to buy arms from the USA. He also tried to get weaponry from Rhodesia, Canada, and Germany, but again had no success. Amongst his abortive arms purchases was an unfulfilled order for Spitfire fighters and half-track armored vehicles. When in desperation Arbenz approached Czechoslovakia, he was more successful and managed to buy a 2,000-ton shipment of "odds and sods" from their army surplus. These included worn-out Mauser vz. 24 rifles, and captured Nazi German MG 34 machine guns and Gewehr 43 automatic rifles. Although this shipment from a pro-Soviet government was next to useless, it was used as a pretext for what was to happen next. According to the US State Department on May 17, the Czech arms deal proved Arbenz's intention to "promote the Soviet plans to conquer the Americas." A US spokesman also claimed that the arrival of this arms shipment would allow Arbenz to triple the size of the Guatemalan Army. The anger of the US and President Eisenhower was to set wheels in motion to overthrow him as soon as possible.

The US Central Intelligence Agency was now given the task of organizing a Guatemalan "liberation army" to invade the country and push Arbenz out. Two CIA operatives, Frank Wisner and Richard Bissell, were put in charge of the organization of this right-wing revolution. They chose an ex-military officer of the Guatemalan Army, Colonel Carlos Castillo Armas, to organize an army and lead the invasion. He had been approached by the CIA as far back as 1950 when he was discovered to be trying to buy arms from the Nicaraguan Government of President Somoza. Now, four years later, he was put in charge of the proposed anti-Arbenz force to be known as the "Guatemalan Liberation Army." The CIA was willing to provide Armas with arms and financial support that amounted to about $7 million. International support was received from two right-wing dictators, Trujillo of the Dominican Republic and Marcos Perez Jimenez of Venezuela. In an effort to create a myth of popular support for the overthrow of Arbenz, the CIA began a number of propaganda exercises. The most important was the setting up of a radio station called the "Voice of Liberation" in early May, which broadcast anti-Arbenz propaganda into Guatemala. It was essential for the CIA that the outside world believed that the invasion of Guatemala was truly a war of liberation. Training camps were set up in both Nicaragua and Honduras, with a total of 85 trainees attending them. Thirty men were given training in sabotage warfare while six were trained as “shock troop” leaders, and another 20 were given general military training. The rebels received a mixture of arms from the CIA, which included a number of old Mauser rifles, modern Danish Madsen M-50 sub-machine guns, and ex-Soviet DP-28 light machine guns and Mosin-Nagant rifles. It was obviously the intention of the CIA to make it look as if the rebels had bought their weapons on the open market. In the weeks before the launching of the invasion the Liberation Army also received support from the US Navy. Under the codename Operation Hardrock Baker, their ships effectively imposed an illegal naval blockade of Guatemala. All ships approaching the Guatemalan coast were stopped and searched to stop any more armaments getting to the Arbenz government. Although they stopped several British and French ships, no strong protests by their governments were issued. In the early Cold War atmosphere, the Arbenz government was now seen as left wing and it had few international supporters.

On June 15, 1954, the 480-strong Liberation Army left its bases in Honduras and Nicaragua and split into four strike forces of varying sizes ranging from 60 to 198 men. They made camp at various points just outside the Guatemalan border and waited for the signal to cross. On the 18th the rebels crossed the border with each given a specific target, while Armas set up his headquarters in a church six miles inside the Guatemalan border and awaited developments with his 120 men. Under Armas’ orders, 122 men advanced towards the town of Zacapa while a 198-strong force attacked the coastal town of Puerto Barrios. A 60-strong force, which tried to cross from El Salvador, was intercepted by Salvadorian police and its members were thrown in a local jail. Other strike forces soon faced problems, with the Zacapa attack force of over a hundred men being defeated in front of the town by a 30-strong force loyal to the president. The Puerto Barrios strike force was thrown back by a unit of loyal police and a crowd of armed dockworkers. In desperation Armas used his “secret” weapon, his air force, to try and restore some momentum to what was turning into a complete farce.

The Liberation Army’s air force organized by the CIA had a handful of aircraft made up of P-47 Thunderbolt and P-38 Lightning fighters, C-47 transports, and Cessna light planes. Its planes had been gathered at Managua Airport and pilots were brought in from other Latin American countries. According to reports, a drunken pilot of the Guatemalan Air Force had been persuaded by the CIA to join the rebels and bring some of his friends with him. This improvised air force was vital to the rebel victory, flying 80 sorties between June 14 and 29. These air attacks included bombing raids by the C-47s on the Guatemalan capital

Guatemala City, using grenades and Molotov Cocktails thrown from the cargo doors. Although these raids caused little material damage, they did convince many Guatemalans that the Liberation Army was much more powerful than it was. A bomber also flew over the capital dropping propaganda leaflets in the middle of a pro-Arbenz rally, causing panic amongst the crowd. In another raid on June 18, a few P-47s flew over the port of San Jose, machine-gunning any military targets. Probably the most devastating raid was an attack by a P-38 Lighting on Puerto San Jose on June 27, which dropped napalm on shipping in the harbor. These air raids and strafing sorties now turned the tables, as the loyal army and Arbenz's supporters believed that they were facing a much larger army. The Liberation Army's air raids had a touch of farce about them, when on at least one occasion empty coca cola bottles were dropped from a C-47 in lieu of explosives. Conventional bombs were used, but some of these were surplus WWII types and did not explode on impact. When it appeared, however, that the handful of planes was insufficient, President Eisenhower secretly allocated a few more with pilots to finish the job.



**Volunteers of the Guatemalan Liberation Army wearing the “dagger through cross” insignia of their right-wing cause guard a supply truck during the June 1954 fighting. They are all armed with US-supplied Danish Madsen M-50 sub-machine guns, part of the mix of weapons from various sources. The supporters of President Arbenz did not flock to fight for him, even though the trade unions had offered 2,000 volunteers. They were to be armed by the government, but only 200 or so turned up at the assembly area. With the army unwilling to fight for him, President Arbenz had little choice but to accept asylum offered by the Mexican Embassy in the capital, and went into exile a few months later. (Cody Images)**

While the Liberation Army meandered its way through the Guatemalan countryside towards the capital, President Arbenz was doing his best to prepare his forces. He still hoped that his loyal army officers could defeat the rebels, and refused to arm the workers who were clamoring for weapons to fight them. Although Arbenz would have liked to use his Czech arms purchases to arm the populace, he was aware that this would push some military officers into the rebel camp. His army commander, General Carlos Enrique Diaz, assured him that his men would “do their duty” and warned him that arming the people would be “unpopular” with his men. An offensive was planned to defeat the rebels, and on June 19 a large military force left Guatemala City for the threatened city of Zacapa. This force was joined by smaller units from garrisons along their line of advance and it looked as if the army would stay loyal to Arbenz. By June 21, the army had gathered their forces at Zacapa under the command of Colonel Victor M. Leon. He assured the president that the rebels would soon be defeated but a aide sent by Arbenz on June 23 to check things out was less sure. He said that the army was demoralized and, in his opinion, it would not fight for him when it was ordered to do so. On the 25th Arbenz received a message from the military officers at Zacapa asking him to resign for the sake of the country. They said that even though the Liberation Army might be weak it had the support of the USA and this meant it would eventually triumph. In addition, they said that the US support for the rebels was down to the policies of Arbenz and he was to blame for the invasion. Another blow came when the Liberation Army won what proved to be its only victory of the revolution, defeating a government garrison at Chiquimula. Although an insignificant victory, its importance was totally exaggerated by the Voice of Liberation and other propaganda means. Arbenz now made the decision to arm as many of his loyal supporters as possible with weapons from the Czech shipment. This poorly trained militia was to be made up mainly of Indians and would hopefully support the loyal units of the Guatemalan Army in defeating the rebels. Arbenz hoped that the reforms he had brought in to help the Indian population would at least guarantee their loyalty, but he was to be disappointed. At a meeting on the 25th he had been assured by trade union leaders that they had 2,000 men ready to fight if they received rifles. When the volunteers were mustered the next day only 200 turned up, and Arbenz realized that he could not win and prepared to resign from his office. Any remaining loyalty that he had from the army was destroyed by his gamble of trying to create a “People’s Army.”

**In August 1954 the right-wing Guatemalan Liberation Army was officially disbanded after it had served its purpose in overthrowing President Arbenz Guzman. The new president, Castillo Armas, was reluctant to disband what was effectively his own private army. He, however, came under increasing pressure from Guatemalan Army officers who supported a revolt by military cadets calling for the end of the Liberation Army. Its members could always be called upon in future to defend the country from the left-wingers and Communists, whom they hated. (Cody Images)**

**Costa Rican Loyalist volunteers are assembled at Liberia Fort ready to go into battle against rebel forces in February 1955. The officer in the background is checking names and what type of weapon the men are being issued with. Some have been issued with WWII-era M1 Garand rifles, while others appear to have Mauser rifles of various models. They will face the poorly organized 1,500-strong invasion force led by right-wing politician Rafael Angel Calderon Guardia. According to the photograph caption, rebel troops were reported to be "deserting and selling their guns to buy food." (Cody Images)**

On June 27, Arbenz tended his resignation and left the country, arriving eventually in Mexico. In addition, 120 of his loyal supporters were allowed to leave Guatemala for exile in various countries. Things did not go totally to plan for the invaders when Arbenz was replaced by Colonel Carlos Diaz, the head of the Guatemalan armed forces. He shocked the CIA by declaring that he would resist the invaders, so bombing raids by the rebel air force continued. They hit the capital Guatemala City and the HQ of the army, leading to Diaz's ousting after one day as president. He was in turn replaced by a new junta of military officers, who signed a pact with Armas on July 2. This led in due course to the rebel leader becoming president and the reversal of all of Arbenz's reforms. Any opponents of the new right-wing government were persecuted and a reign of terror spread throughout Guatemala. Trade union rights were repealed and 800,000 acres of land were taken back from the people and returned to the United Fruit Company. President Armas also disenfranchised 70 percent of the population when he took the vote away from anyone who was illiterate. His hold on power was fragile, however, although he did manage to remain president until his assassination in 1957.

## "A Little War" –The Invasion of Costa Rica 1955

In early 1955 several Pathé newsreels were shown in British cinemas featuring a war in a far-off and little-known country called Costa Rica. The commentary said that there had been little fighting so far in this conflict, which the narrator described as, “Central America’s Little War.” At the beginning of January 1955, the Central American state of Costa Rica was faced by an invasion by the political opponents of President Jose Figueres Ferrer. This was not just another simple ex-president in exile invades his former country sort of conflict, as there was an international element to this “little war.” Costa Rica was seen as being far too liberal and pro-Communist by the unofficial right-wing “dictators club” of Latin America. Any attack on Costa Rica could count to some extent on the support of the main members of this club. They were the dictators of neighboring Nicaragua to the north, Guatemala to the west, and the Dominican Republic. Venezuela’s president, Perez Jimenez, was also more than willing to aid any attempt to overthrow President Figueres. They all now agreed to arm and train a rebel army to invade Costa Rica and get rid of Figueres. A few hundred volunteers began training in Nicaragua given by Somoza’s National Guardsmen. Their weapons came initially from the cast offs of the National Guard, but just before the invasion ten aircraft arrived from Venezuela that according to reports were “fully laden,” presumably with small arms for the rebels. Reports got back to Figueres of the creation of the rebel army, which he described as “an army of adventurers.” They were said to be training quite openly and press reports said that their volunteers were making no secret of their intentions. Figueres now prepared to fight the expected invasion with all the rather meagre means at his disposal. The Costa Rican Army in 1955 had an official strength of 9,000 men but this was a very optimistic figure. During the coming war the country would have to call up anyone capable of bearing arms and police and other paramilitaries would be sent to the front. A volunteer corps was called up and was armed with all the still serviceable old weapons acquired by Costa Rica over the years. This weaponry included the leftovers from the 1940s (see Chapter 10), as well as 2,000 M1 Garand semi-automatic rifles and a few Browning heavy machine guns bought on the open market. Older weaponry seen in use during the war included a few of the now ancient Skoda mountain guns and WW1-era Browning M1919 machine guns. Figueres got a major boost when he received the support of one of the heroes of the 1948 war, Frank Marshall. Marshall told him that he was willing to fight again and that 300 of his veterans from the war seven years before would follow him into battle.

## The Ground War

On January 11, a vanguard of 400 trained rebels crossed the Nicaraguan–Costa Rican border and seized a few border towns. They called themselves the rather incongruous “Authentic Anti-Communist Revolutionary Army,” presumably because they wanted to liberate Costa Rica from Communism. The rebel commander, Teodoro Picardo Lara, the son of a former president, took a small force and captured the town of Villa Quesada. New recruits joined the rebel army, which was able to arm them with rifles supplied by the Nicaraguan dictator, Somoza. At its height the Calderonist force reached a reported 1,500 men and many of these were fairweather volunteers who would switch sides if things went badly. The rebel control of Villa Quesada was short lived, however, with a thrust by the government forces taking in back the next day. In an attempt to stop the war, the Organization of American States rushed its observers to the Nicaraguan–Costa Rican border and created a buffer zone. They reported that they had proof that Nicaraguan dictator Somoza was actively supporting the rebels. Somoza reacted to this declaration by the OAS by offering to end the fighting in his own fashion. At a press conference he offered to settle the dispute between himself and Figueres with a duel fought on the border between their countries. His statement, which he read proudly, said, “If he hates me so much let him come out and fight like a man without trying to involve the innocent people of the two countries.” Figueres did not reply, and anyway his forces were now ready to go over to the offensive and end the war by military means. On January 17, a government offensive was launched to throw the rebels back across the border. The outnumbered rebels gave ground and by the 19th the only sizeable rebel force of 500 men was now in the extreme north-west of the country. They were in the La Cruz region and most of them were now looking to get out of the country and had no stomach left for the fight. This last rebel force was to face a 1,400-strong government army, which began moving towards their base. When the two armies met on January 25, the sheer numbers of the government army overwhelmed the rebels. Amongst the rebel dead was their commander, Teodoro Picardo Lara, whose loss broke their morale. Three hundred of the rebels now surrendered and the rest of the now demoralized troops fled to the border. On the 29th, a few dozen were cornered by the pursuing government troops and ten were killed in a firefight, with another eight men being taken prisoner. The last action of the ground war took place on February 2, when the victorious government troops took the town of Los Chiles. Although described as a “little war” the unofficial casualty list for the war was high, with 1,000 soldiers and civilians killed. The victory of the government forces was complete on the ground, and in the meantime a small-scale air war had been taking place above them.

## The Air War

Costa Rica had disbanded its small air force in 1950 and had sold all its aircraft at bargain-basement prices. This decision was regretted when a rebel fighter flew over the city center of San Jose and strafed its streets before flying off. A few Italian WWII-era 20mm anti-aircraft guns and US heavy machine guns fired at the plane but it was gone before the poorly trained crews could react. It was later reported by the CIA that the fighter was a Venezuelan plane loaned to the rebels along with its pilot. The rebel air force was small, but the lack of any air opposition at the start of the war meant it was going to be vital to the success of the rebellion. Its exact strength was kept secret, but it appears that there were two AT-6s sent from Nicaragua and another P-47 fighter from Guatemala. One C-47 transport flown by an American mercenary, Jerry Delarm, was lost when it crash-landed en route to the war. At the start of the war President Figueres had immediately taken control of all the civil aircraft in Costa Rica, which included several C-46 transports of the national airline LACSA. There were also some Cessna light planes, but no aircraft that could counter the rebel fighters and attack planes. His only chance of getting combat planes in time to affect the air war was to appeal directly to the USA. They agreed to supply him with a few planes on the understanding that they were only for use until the rebels were defeated. The Costa Ricans’ improvised air force was then formed overnight on January 16, with the purchase from the USA for $1.00 dollar each of four P-51 Mustang fighters. They were transferred from the Texas National Guard, and when they arrived in Costa Rica a few local commercial pilots were given a crash course in flying them. US sources also supplied the Costa Ricans with a single DC-3 transport, which became an improvised bomber-ground-attack plane. This plane was flown on a few ground-attack missions against rebel ground forces with a Browning .50 heavy machine gun set up to fire from the cargo door. The only known mission by the P-51s was a ground attack by three of the four planes on the town of Los Chiles. This attack was said to have totally demoralized the rebel garrison in the town and allowed the government forces to take it from them. Once the fighting was over the four P-51s were written off, and the Costa Rican Air Force was once again defunct. The surviving rebel aircraft were flown by their mercenary pilots back to their mutual bases in Nicaragua and Guatemala.

**A mortar section of the Cuban National Army fires towards a rebel encampment in the Sierra Maestra in 1957. Batista’s troops were fairly well equipped with light weapons and light and medium artillery, as well as light tanks and other armored vehicles supplied mainly by the USA. Their morale, especially in the closing stages of the fighting, was not equal to that of their revolutionary foes, however. (Cody Images)**

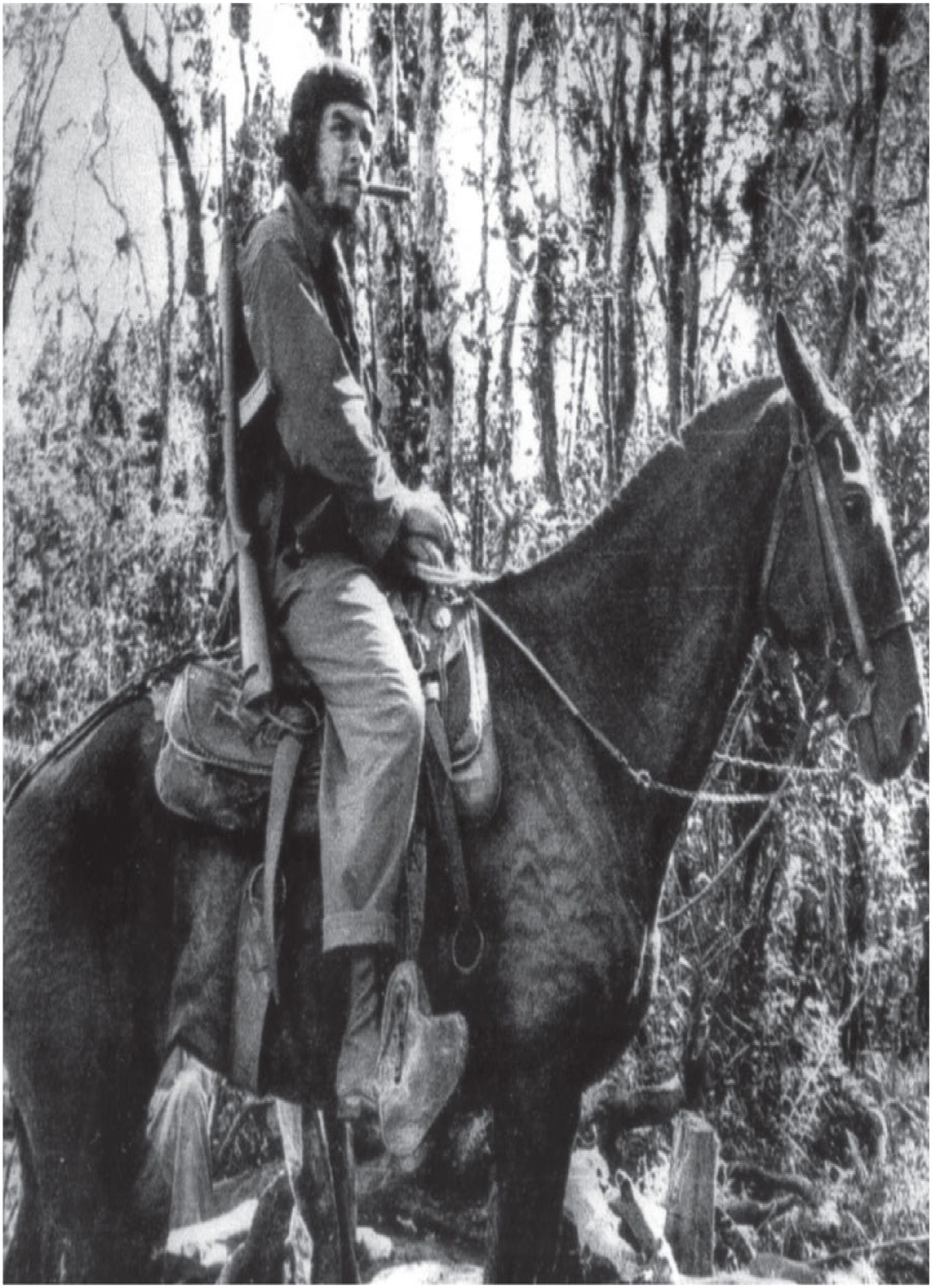
## The Cuban Revolution 1956–59

In the early 1950s, Cuba was back under the firm control of Fulgencio Batista, the military officer who had overthrown the government in the “Revolt of the Sergeants” in 1933. Batista took power for himself in 1934 and ruled Cuba until 1944 but had never really lost his influence in the eight years he was out of power. In the 1940s Batista had established contacts with various crime syndicates in the USA and gained the support of the US Government. In 1952 he used his continued popularity with the Cuban Army and US support to seize power again and to suspend the constitution. Once in power he established links with organized crime in the USA and began to take millions of dollars in bribes from the Mafia. In return he allowed the Mafia to build new casinos and hotels in Havana to take advantage of Cuba’s reputation of being the playground of the American rich. Cuba was now an “anything goes” country where the Mafia could launder drug money, buying off Cuban officials whenever necessary. None of the millions of dollars coming into the country filtered down to the ordinary Cubans and Batista’s government was highly unpopular with the majority. It was not just the poor who were suffering, and honest Cubans of all classes hated the way their country was being exploited by some Americans.

The history of Cuba was to be changed, however, by the actions of a middle-class son of a factory owner, Fidel Castro. Born in 1926, even as a child he was aware of the gross inequalities of Cuban society and wanted to change things. After studying law for a few years in the late 1940s he joined the newly formed Cuban People’s Party. He left Cuba to get involved in revolutionary activities on the Caribbean island of the Dominican Republic and in Colombia. By the early 1950s he was back in Cuba having learned much from his travels, and was now prepared to try and overthrow the Batista government.

Castro's first attempt at fomenting a revolution in Cuba went disastrously wrong when, on July 26, 1953, he led an attack on the Moncada Barracks in Havana. He led 160 mostly young revolutionaries against the barracks, hoping that this would spark off a general uprising in Cuba. Half of the attackers were killed in the assault and many of those who were captured suffered a terrible fate, being tortured and then killed. Castro was put on trial but escaped execution; he was sent to prison, but was released in 1955 under an amnesty by Batista. The dictator was confident that Castro and his followers were no longer a threat to his regime.

Castro traveled to Mexico with a few companions to begin planning his next revolution and to train a small army with which he could invade Cuba. On December 2, 1956, on the southern tip of Cuba, 82 rebel Cubans landed on Las Colorados Beach near Belic. They landed from a small and overcrowded launch, the Granma, and were almost immediately attacked by government troops. Totally outnumbered and outgunned, they suffered heavy casualties and their numbers were reduced to 12 fighters. One of the survivors of the ambush was Fidel Castro, who led them away from the fighting. They were met by friendly guides who led them into the Sierra Maestra mountain range, which reaches a height of 6,000 feet. A jungle base was established in the mountains, protected from government attack by its remote location. From their fairly secure mountain base they launched attacks against isolated Batista army garrisons and captured valuable weaponry. Their successes also saw the expansion of the rebel army, as sympathizers made their way from the cities to join them. Castro was careful to keep the guerrilla numbers at a sustainable level of a few hundred men and a few women. By spring 1957 the rebel army had grown to 80 fighters, although some were still unarmed at that point. The security of the base was vital to the rebels' survival and any suspected agents or spies of the Batista army were swiftly executed. Castro was aware that his small band of guerrillas could become isolated and ignored by Batista. One of his first acts was to establish a rebel radio station that broadcast from Pico Turguino, the highest peak in the Sierra Maestra. This station acted as a propaganda tool for Castro, exaggerating the size of his army and its successes. He also built up a network of propagandists, called "bolas," who spread news and rumors to the population. Any of Castro's agents in the cities were under constant threat of arrest and execution from Batista’s own efficient intelligence service, known as SIM. Batista’s chief of police, Colonel Esteban Ventura, was a brutal but highly efficient officer who was responsible for the deaths of hundreds of Castro supporters. Gradually the rebels took control of most of Oriente Province outside the big towns, which were still held by strong Batista army garrisons. The rebels also established supply lines from two ports, Trinidad and Niquero, by which they could bring in limited supplies of medicines, arms, and ammunition. Castro knew, however, that the best “quartermaster” that the rebels could have were the government’s Guardia Rural, Guardia Nacional, and the Batista army.

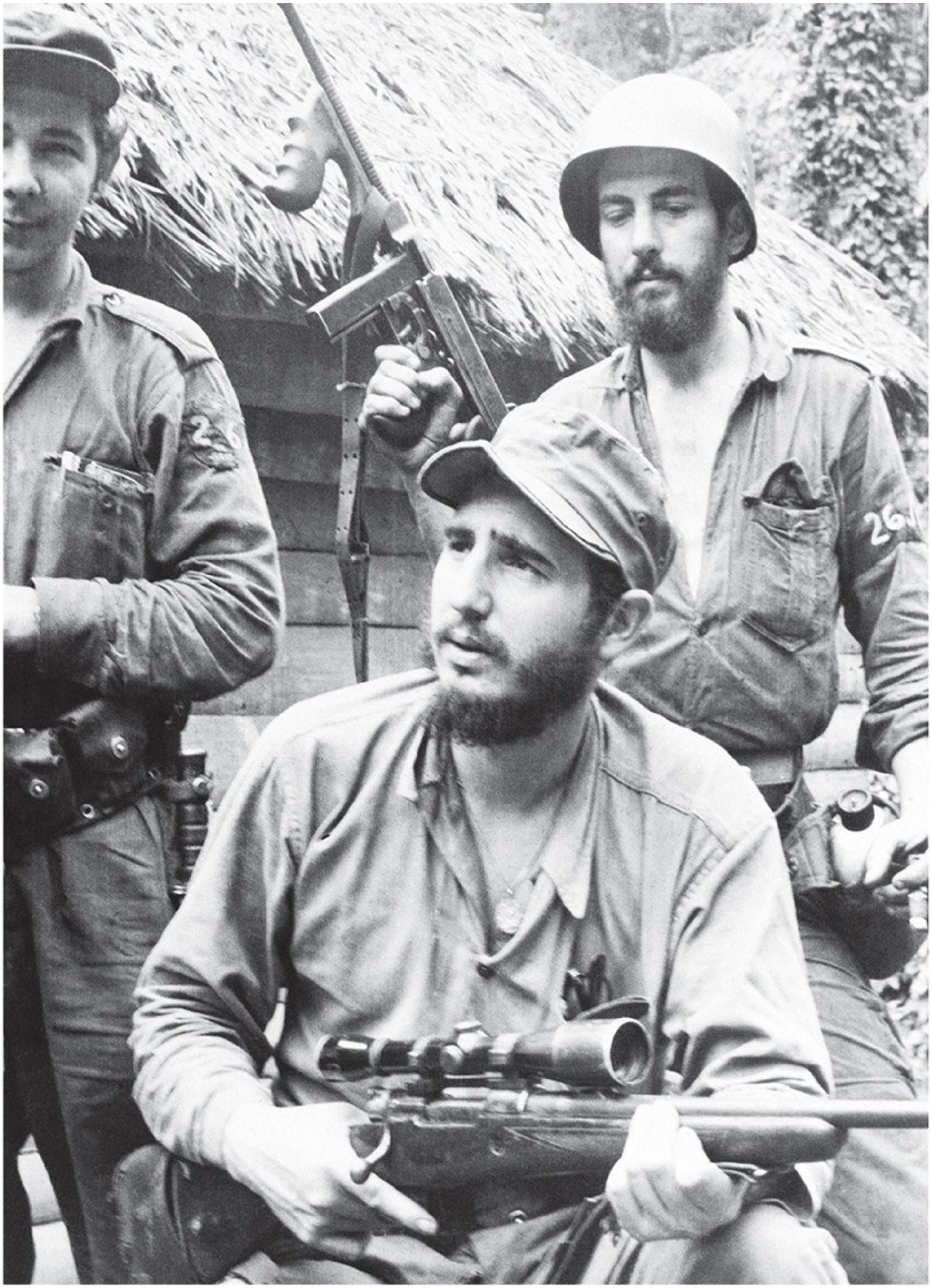


**The Argentinean revolutionary Che Guevara is seen riding a mule in the Sierra Maestra in 1958. Che had become a Marxist in his homeland in his teens and joined the failed revolution in Guatemala in 1954. Having met Fidel Castro in Mexico two years later, he joined the small band of revolutionaries who landed in Cuba in 1956. In 1958 he led one of the columns that advanced on the Cuban capital Havana and won the decisive battle of Santa Clara. (Cody Images)**

## Batista’s Army 1956–59

Batista had held on to power mainly with the help of his loyal army, whose officers and men he was careful to look after. Up to the 1950s the Cuban Army, although inefficient and corrupt, had always been capable of defeating any rebellions. The new enemy may at first have seemed to present little threat to Batista’s rule and he expected to be able to isolate the rebels in their mountain base. Unsurprisingly, the dictator thought that by using his superior numbers and weaponry, a few hundred “bandits” could soon be starved out.

By 1957 the Batista army had reached a strength of 26,000 men, which included 14 special anti-guerrilla battalions and 44 squadrons of Guardia Rural. At the start of 1958 the army had been expanded by 3,000 men and by June it had grown to 38,000 men. However, this expansion was largely due to the conscription of recruits, who were poorly trained and demoralized. The reality was that most of the army was tied down in garrisoning cities and towns and only about 10,000 were available to directly confront the various guerrilla groups. Corruption was rife in the Batista army, with officers, especially the more senior ranks, exploiting their position to the full. Officers pocketed the pay of phantom soldiers who were added to the roll call and some sold weapons and ammunition to the rebels. The Batista army certainly had more than enough heavy equipment and weaponry to deal with the rebels, with Marmon-Herrington CTM-ITBI and M3A1 Stuart light tanks and a few M4 Shermans. They also had 105mm howitzers and 75mm pack howitzers, as well as plenty of mortars of several types. A US arms embargo had affected the proficiency of the Cuban Army, but Batista was still confident that it could crush the rebellion. Batista’s rule was also enforced by an efficient and brutal police force and secret service with spies in the revolutionary movement. Police Chief Colonel Esteban Ventura was notorious for torturing and killing rebel sympathizers, and in the latter stages of the conflict, in an attempt to terrify the people, he had the bodies of tortured victims dumped in public. His men also began to openly shoot down anyone suspected of supporting the rebels on the streets of Havana. These tactics caused a backlash from some Batista army officers, who now began to secretly sympathize with Castro. Whatever the government did, the popularity of the rebels increased the longer the fighting continued, and Batista decided to crush Castro and his men once and for all.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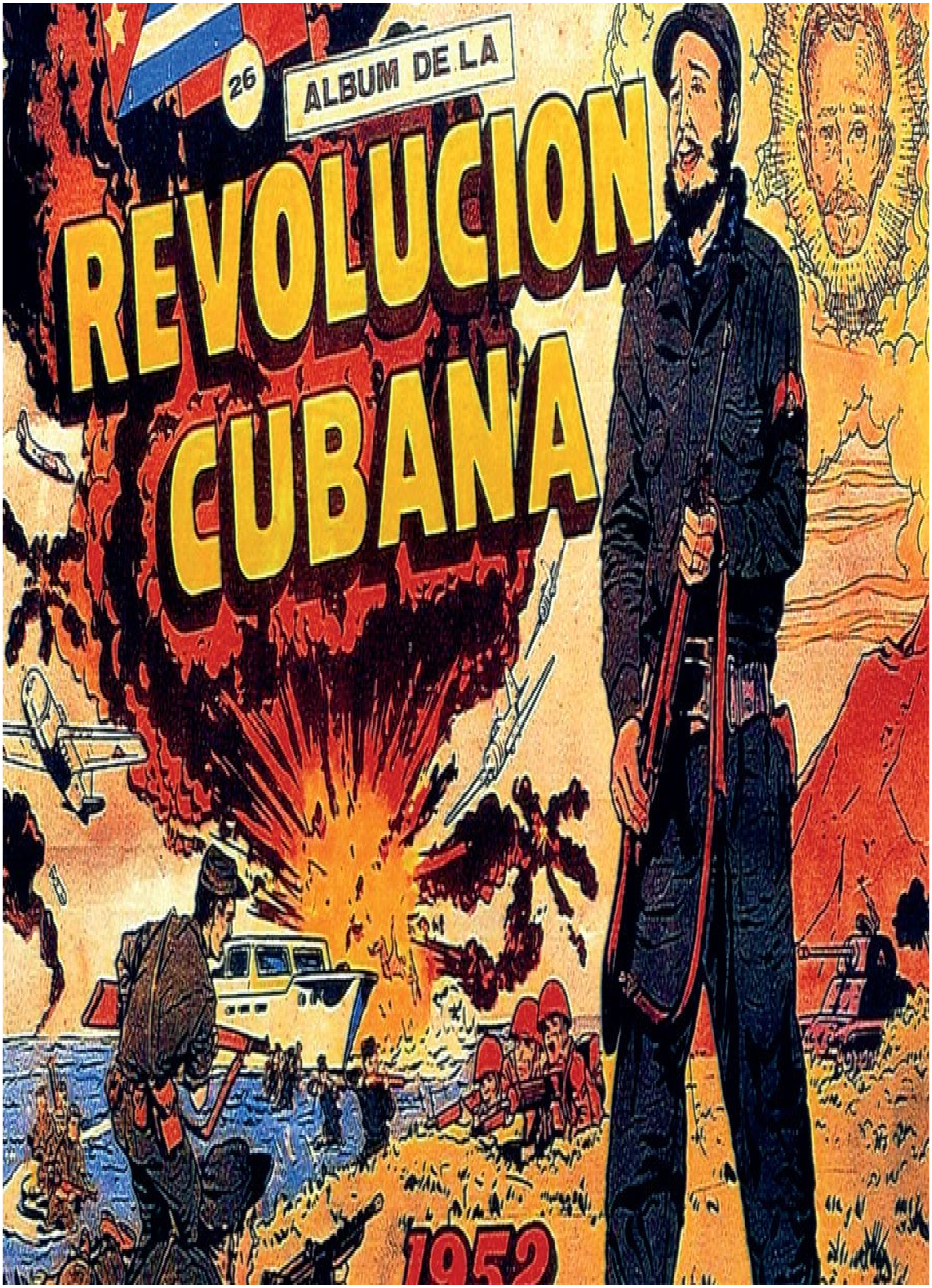
**Fidel Castro sits in his mountain encampment in 1958 cradling a sporting rifle with sights. On at least one occasion Fidel had to personally execute spies who had been planted into the growing revolutionary forces by Batista's intelligence services. To his right is his brother Raul, who was five years younger and who was to serve Fidel faithfully from 1959 until his death in November 2016. For the last eight years of Fidel's life, Raul held the post of president due to his older brother's failing health. (Library of Congress)**

## Operation Verono – Summer Operation

In the summer of 1958 Batista sent 20,000 troops against Castro's 300 guerrillas in the Sierra Maestra. This offensive by Batista's army was really the last throw of the dice for the dictator and his regime. Beginning on June 28, 11,000 of the 20,000 troops available planned simply to surround the rebels' base. The offensive was under the command of two officers, General Eulogio Cantillo and General Alberto del Rio Chaviano. They were under the misconception that Castro had between 1,000–2,000 hardened guerrillas under his command. Castro's propaganda had successfully convinced the Batista government that his force was much larger than it was. The Batista forces were crucially weakened by the fact that about 7,000 of their troops were poorly trained raw recruits. These "Casquitos" or "little helmets" had little or no training and were cannon fodder against Castro's guerrillas. The two generals had 15 infantry battalions, six independent companies, and one company of light tanks against Castro's 300 men. During the offensive there were a number of large-scale skirmishes or small battles, which did not always go in the guerrillas' favor. At La Plata, a running battle took place between the 11th and 21st of July in which the Batista troops were defeated and 240 were taken prisoner. On July 29 a battle took place at Las Mercedes, which ended in a guerrilla defeat and saw Castro call for a temporary truce. By the time the truce ended on August 1, Castro had taken advantage of the lull in the fighting to extract his surrounded men from the area. Fighting had ended by August 8 and the Batista army was now fatally weakened and demoralized. During the fighting they had lost 142 M-1 rifles, 12 heavy machine guns, 21 light machine guns, and two bazookas to Castro's men. In addition, 200 Cristobal sub-machine guns newly imported from the Dominican

Republic had also been captured. The biggest prize for the guerrillas was a government M3A1 tank, which would be used in the offensive that was soon to follow. The offensive failed dismally and by December the rebels were strong enough to threaten Santiago da Cuba, Cuba’s second largest city. They also threatened to take control of the province of Las Villas, which would mean Cuba being split in two.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ALBUM DE LA
REVOLUCION
CUBANA
1952

**This colorful cover belongs to a post-Cuban Revolution album of collectors' cards glorifying Fidel Castro's victory. In the aftermath of the 1959 revolution, Castro and his government were popular with many in the USA and Europe. As Castro moved towards the left and received support from the USSR, his popularity with people in the West diminished. (Author's Collection)**

**Nicaraguan troops wait along the border with Honduras ready to intercept any Honduran soldiers trying to cross in May 1957. The Hondurans had announced the formation of a new state called “Gracias a Dios” in Nicaraguan territory in February. Nicaragua was never going to allow this Honduran-supported breakaway, and war was inevitable. The National Guardsmen are well turned out with their light khaki cotton uniforms and M1 steel helmets. Their M1 Garand rifles have been supplied by the USA as part of their support for “friendly” Latin American states. (Cody Images)**

## The Fall of Batista

Batista had staked everything on the success of Operation Verono and its abject failure meant that his government’s fall was now inevitable. At the end of August 1958 Castro decided that the time was ripe to go over to the offensive regardless of the odds against them. Three columns were quickly organized to begin the advance, on foot with only mules for transport, to Havana 500 miles away. The first column under the command of Camilo Cienfuegos had only 82 men but it was hoped that more men would join it as it advanced. A second column under the command of Che Guevara had 150 men, while Castro himself led a third column with 230 men out of the mountain base in September. They advanced north-westwards along the spine of Cuba from their base in the south-east, expecting to have to fight all the way to Havana. Although the rebels were totally outnumbered their morale was high, and it had already been proven that Batista’s army was totally demoralized. Che Guevara’s men took the city of Caibaguan while Cienfuegos’ column took Yaguajay on the northern coast, before both columns joined at the city of Santa Clara. By late December, Guevara’s column had more than doubled in size to 340 men and women. When they united with Cienfuegos’ column, they attacked Santa Clara, a town in the center of the island with a population of 150,000. It was garrisoned by 3,500 government troops, who, in normal circumstances, should have been able to easily defeat the rebels. Over three days of bitter street fighting the rebels gained the advantage with the help of sympathetic townspeople who attacked the army. They threw homemade Molotov cocktails at the troops, and any that could capture rifles joined the rebel forces. Against all the odds the rebels took the town and the news spread throughout Cuba and beyond to the USA. The US

Government had realized for a while that Batista’s regime was doomed and were unwilling to continue support for him. They had already stopped arms shipments to the army in March 1958 and Batista now saw that the writing was on the wall. His army had no fight left in it, and as the three rebel columns advanced, its troops melted away in most cases. On New Year’s Eve 1958, Batista and his family and entourage left Havana carrying as many of their riches as they could. It was estimated that his personal fortune was in excess of $300 million, accumulated over 20 years. When he arrived in the Dominican Republic ruled by his friend Trujillo, Batista bemoaned the performance of his army against the rebel forces. The advance of Castro’s rebels now became a virtual victory procession as Batista’s army commanders and politicians awaited their fate. Castro’s 1,000-strong army arrived in Havana on the night of January 1–2, to scenes of jubilation from the long-suffering people.

## The Honduran–Nicaraguan Border War 1957

The two Central American states had been in conflict throughout the first half of the 20th century, usually over territorial claims. In February 1957 the Honduran Government issued a decree that created a new state on its disputed border with Nicaragua. The territory of this new state known as “Gracias a Dios” included some disputed Nicaraguan territory and the declaration was seen by Nicaragua as a blatant act of war. Honduran troops were ferried into the disputed territory in the early days of March by DC-3 military transports and seconded civilian aircraft. Both nations prepared for war, but the Honduran military admitted that their actions in invading Nicaragua had been a “tactical error.” The war was slow to develop, with the first clashes taking place in mid-April over the control of the village of Mocoron, which was taken by 50 Nicaraguan National Guardsmen on the 19th. Heavy fighting between Nicaraguan and Honduran troops took place for this nondescript village in the middle of the jungle. On the 25th the Honduran ambassador was recalled from Nicaragua in protest at the taking of the village. Skirmishes continued, and on May 1, the Nicaraguans lost 35 troops in a firefight with Honduran soldiers, whose casualties were unknown. Both nations now went onto a war footing, with the expansion of their small armies a priority. The 2,500-strong Honduran Army and the 3,200-strong Nicaraguan National

Guard were totally inadequate to fight for a prolonged period. In Honduras university students and high school students were being given military training to replace the troops sent to the front line. The troops sent to the war zone included hastily seconded police, with the whole force of the Honduran capital Tegucigalpa being conscripted into military service. Thirty thousand Honduran fruit workers were said to have volunteered to fight, but the army did not have enough rifles to give them. Truckloads of Nicaraguan National Guardsmen were also sent to the front, leaving capital city Managua empty of troops. The Nicaraguan president, Anastazio Somoza, ordered a general mobilization but there was little that could be achieved without further arms. Fighting broke out at several other points along the border but neither country had the resources to send reinforcements to these areas. Any fighting that did take place was usually between a few regulars and locals armed with machetes or whatever weapons they could find. On May 8, the Nicaraguans attacked Honduran troops in the Cifuentes Region, which was 150 miles southwest of the original war zone.

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**Nicaraguan National Guardsmen guard a cache of arms taken from rebels who had tried to cross the border from Honduras on June 12, 1959. The poorly organized invasion never really got off the ground and many of the rebel forces, including a few Cuban volunteers, surrendered without firing a shot. This was one of the first attempts by the new Cuban revolutionary government to spread their revolution to the rest of Latin America. At this time the c.4,000-strong National Guard was more than capable of dealing with internal disturbances like this. (Cody Images)**

**Soldiers of the Dominican Republic's National Army take part in bayonet practice at the time of a Cuban-supported invasion of the island in June 1959. The 10,000-strong army was equipped from diverse sources with WWII-era Swedish tanks and armored cars and modern French AMX-13 tanks. After the victory of the Cuban Revolution, the army was expanded by another 8,000 conscripts. President Trujillo's agents now bought new weaponry from anyone who was willing to sell it to the unpopular regime. (Photo by Hank Walker/The LIFE Picture Collection/Getty Images)**

Aircraft played a prominent part in the war, with both air forces having prop-driven fighters and light bombers. The Nicaraguans had a number of P-51 Mustang fighters and T-6G Texan trainers employed as strike planes, while the Hondurans had P-38 Lightning fighters. Both air forces flew a number of missions over the war zone but, in reality, there were no worthwhile targets for them to attack. On May 5, five Honduran planes bombed the Nicaraguan-held village, with further attacks taking place the next day. It was claimed at the time that three of the Honduran P-38s had been shot down during these raids. Ground fighting continued sporadically until early July, when the OAS brokered a truce. The dispute between the two countries was finally settled in 1960, with the border reverting to its pre-1957 status.

## The Invasion of Nicaragua June 1959

In the immediate aftermath of the Cuban Revolution, the victorious Castro and his followers looked to expand their revolution throughout Latin America. Nicaragua was seen as one of the most reactionary regimes in Central America, having been run since 1936 as a "family business" by the Somoza family. Over his 23-year rule, Somoza had run the impoverished country into the ground while enriching his family and followers. When the Cubans were approached by an anti-Somoza group, they willingly gave their support to their plan to invade Nicaragua. The invasion was launched from neighboring Honduras without the permission of the government there and included a group of 28 battle-hardened Cubans. Led by former National Guard Lieutenant Rafael Somarriba, the mixed group of Cubans and left-wing Nicaraguans and Hondurans soon ran into problems. Faced by both the Nicaraguan National Guard and the Honduran Army, the poorly organized “revolution” soon fell apart. The young Nicaraguan dictator Luis Somoza Debayle dismissed the attempt to overthrow his rule as nothing more than a “flop.” He had taken over from his father Anastasio in September 1956 after the latter had been shot four times at point blank range by an assassin.

## The Invasion of the Dominican Republic 1959

In the immediate aftermath of the Cuban Revolution, political exiles all over Latin America saw at last their chance to overturn a number of reactionary regimes. They hoped for the support of Fidel Castro and his revolutionary government, and some were indeed to receive it. One such group was the Dominican Liberation Movement, whose aim was the overthrow of the continuing dictatorship of General Trujillo. He had survived several attempts in the 1940s to liberate the island, with the last one in 1949 ending in a dismal failure (see Chapter 10). Now, however, the Dominican exiles knew that they could rely on the support of the Cubans and they were willing to try again. The revolutionaries now got three months of training in Cuba’s newly established training camps. By June a disparate group of Dominican exiles, Cuban volunteers, and a few revolutionary adventurers were ready to go. The plan was audacious but also naïve, as it depended totally on the support of the downtrodden peasantry of the Dominican Republic. Several C-46 planes flown by sympathetic pilots set off from their bases in Cuba and landed in the center of the Caribbean island at the town of Constanza on June 14. Aboard were 63 revolutionaries well armed with captured Batista weapons, who now tried to get the local population to join their revolution. Trujillo had not been idle, however, and had mobilized his army to deal with this tiny revolutionary army. As the airborne force landed, another larger group of 150 men were landing on the coast at Puerto Plata in two Chris-Craft launches. Trujillo was not fazed by either invasion and proclaimed, “If aggressors want to see their beards and brains flying like butterflies, let them approach the shores of the Dominican Republic!" As Trujillo's army units moved in to deal with both groups of rebels, any hope of support by the people disappeared. In fact, according to government propaganda, some peasants attacked their "liberators" with machetes. By June 20, the last of the outnumbered and outgunned revolutionaries had been either killed or captured. Those who had been captured were quickly executed, but not until they had been brutally tortured by Trujillo's secret police. The Dominican people may have wanted rid of Trujillo, but they already knew the price they would have paid for joining the doomed revolution, and stayed away.

# THE 1960s

**Fidel Castro dramatically jumps down from one of the Cuban Army’s T-34/85 heavy tanks during the Bag of Pigs fighting. The Soviet-supplied heavy tanks and SU-85 self-propelled guns were a decisive factor in the revolutionary army’s victory. Against this heavy armor the Cuban exiles only had a few US M41 Bulldog light tanks, which were more modern but were totally outgunned. (Cody Images)**

The victory of Fidel Castro and his revolutionaries in the late 1950s changed the face of Latin America in the 1960s. It caused the populations of many Central and South American countries to believe that they too could overthrow the military dictators and regimes that dominated the region. In Cuba itself, Castro’s victory led him and his leadership to think that they could spread their revolution not only throughout Latin America, but also through Africa and the Far East. It was to take most of the decade for the reality of this dream of “world socialism” to be broken. In the USA, Castro’s revolutionary government was soon seen as a threat to the peace of Latin America. Castro’s increasingly close political and military alliance with the Soviet Union in the early 1960s made him and his government into a pariah in the eyes of the West and in particular the United States. For the whole of the 1960s Cuba and the USA were to be at loggerheads, as both countries hated the political system of the other. In this one-sided conflict there was probably only going to be one winner, but the attitude of the Soviet Union at the height of the Cold War to the Cuba–USA dispute was the unknown and frightening factor.

## The Aftermath of the Cuban Revolution

The Cuban revolutionaries were quick to take revenge on those who had fought for or supported the Batista regime. In the first two months after the revolution, an estimated 300 ex-Batista police and other security forces were shot. It was reported that one execution involved the shooting of 70 ex-police officers, spies, and informers between dawn and midday on January 12, 1959. They were shot on the edge of a pit one by one while the rest of the condemned watched and waited for their turn. As the Batista army and police forces were not that large, the total of 700 killed between 1959 and 1961 represented a significant element. As this repression was going on, a number of prominent Castro supporters from the 1950s defected. They were often unhappy with Castro's increasing dependence on the Soviet Union and his pro-Communist policy. While some escaped to the USA, others went underground, and many were captured and either jailed or executed as "traitors." Meanwhile, in the countryside a large number of disaffected Cubans, many of whom had fought for Castro, were now taking up arms against him.

## The "Bandido" Counter-Revolution 1959–65

Opposition to the new revolutionary government in Cuba began almost as soon as it came to power. Some were Fidel Castro's former comrades, disillusioned with the pro-Communist stance that he had begun to take. Others did not want the rule of the dictator Batista to be replaced by the authoritarian rule of Castro. Small bands of "Bandidos" were formed in most provinces of Cuba, usually with at most a few dozen fighters. One rebel guerrilla group was led by Osvaldo Raminez, whose men took the name of the "Alzados." The name was taken from the runaway slaves who helped Cuba gain independence from Spain in the 1890s. Beginning his guerrilla campaign with only 18 men, Raminez expanded his group to 38 fighters after a few months. By 1961 he had 200 men in his guerrilla force, but these were coming under increasing pressure from government troops. In July he called together a number of other guerrilla leaders and informed them that he was proclaiming himself the commander-in-chief of the National Liberation Army. By late 1960 there were estimated to be 300 separate bands with a total of 4,000 active fighters and 10,000 supporters. There were reported to be 177 bands in the Escambray Mountains alone, but most had only a handful of men in them. They received support from the local population and arms and ammunition were smuggled to them from the cities. The US Central Intelligence Agency did try flying in supplies from October 1959, but most drops fell into the hands of government troops. Their low-flying planes also came under attack from the new Soviet multi-barrel anti-aircraft guns supplied to Castro, and missions had to be abandoned. Local guerrilla leaders like Delio Almeida in Matanza province and Luis Molina, a pharmacist, were largely on their own and their resistance was met with the full force of the revolutionary army. Castro’s military response to the insurgency, often by his old associates and comrades, was rapid and brutal. It included the formation of 80 anti-bandit battalions, which after training were allocated to the various provinces. There were five in Matanzas, ten each in Pinar del Rio, Camaguay and Oriente, and 20 in Habana province. The largest number of battalions, a total of 25, were stationed in Las Villas province.

## Cuban Government Offensives, 1960–61

The number of rebels in the Escambray Mountains reached about 8,000, formed into units of 20–30 men and women. A larger unit might be 200 strong, but they did not get any larger than this, as it was hard to more than this number of fighters in the jungle. In late 1960 an offensive was launched by the Cuban Army to destroy all rebel groups in the Escambray Mountains. Castro was taking no chances with the rebels, who could have grown in the same way as his guerrillas had if left alone. He sent 12,000 troops and 80,000 revolutionary militia into the rebel strongholds under the command of Dermidio Escalona. Some of the troops had been formed into special “Batallones de Lucha Contra Bandidos” or anti-guerrilla battalions. Despite the overwhelming numbers of troops involved, the offensive made little headway against the experienced and battle-hardened rebels. The Soviet Union now stepped in and sent a group of KGB trainers to a training camp near the Cuban city of Trinidad in January 1961. They “advised” the Cuban military to increase drastically the number of troops committed to the anti-rebel offensive. A staggering 70,000 troops and 110,000 revolutionary militia were now sent against the rebels. The army was also under orders to remove any possible support for the rebels from local peasants who might sympathize with the Alzados. A total of up to 80,000 people were removed from their villages in a time-honored anti-insurgent tactic. They were sent to so-called captive villages, where they were kept under the watchful eye of pro-Castro militia. Without support from the locals and with no help coming from external agencies like the CIA, the rebels were doomed. Individual bands were gradually isolated and destroyed without mercy by Castro’s army. By the end of the 1961 campaign it was estimated that 3,000 out of the 3,995 Alzados had been killed, wounded or captured. Government losses were estimated at 550 killed and 200 wounded.

**In the autumn of 1960 these Cuban exiles are receiving small-unit tactical training and survival skills at their “secret” camp in Guatemala. Once this part of the training was completed, the CIA and US Army instructors switched to conventional warfare training. This training included preparations for amphibious landings on the beaches of Cuba, where most of these men would find themselves the following April. (Cody Images)**

**This well-armed group of Anti-Castro guerrilla leaders are meeting in the Escambray Mountains to co-ordinate their attacks against the revolutionary government of Cuba in April 1962. The man in the right center of the photograph is Captain Everado Sales, leader of the National Second Front of Escambray Forces. On his right at left center of the photograph is Lieutenant Elio Valmaseda, another group leader. Anti-Castro guerrilla groups were diverse in their political affiliations but were united in their opposition to the Cuban Government. Their struggle was not to last much longer, however, as thousands of Cuban troops were sent to crush them in their various remote mountain and jungle bases. (Cody Images)**

## Continued Resistance 1961–65

In 1962 two of the best known of the anti-Castro guerrilla leaders were to meet their end, with the first being the only black leader, Margarito Lanza Flores. Flores, who was known as “Commandante Tondique,” commanded a small guerrilla group in northern Las Villas province. He was a Robin Hood-type character who was particularly loathed by Castro as a traitor to his slave ancestors. In early March, his small band was surrounded in a sugar cane field by hundreds of militia. The field was set on fire and a severely burned Flores and seven of his men were captured and put on display. Flores’ burns went untreated and he was made to stand in the sun in agony until taken with his men to a local bridge and shot. A few weeks later on April 16, Osvaldo Ramirez and his band of Alzados were surrounded and he was killed during the firefight. Castro had chosen to offer him an amnesty out of respect for his service to the revolution but Ramirez chose to continue the fight until his death. This kind of tragic scenario was played out all over Cuba as more and more guerrillas were cornered and killed by the superior government forces. In August 1963 a new group, the “Commandos Mambises,” began limited operations, but these were soon dealt with by the Cuban Army. By 1965, the last of the rebel bands had been defeated and Fidel Castro was in total control of Cuba.

# The Bay of Pigs 1961

The victory of Fidel Castro in the 1959 revolution received an ambiguous welcome from the US Government. Castro traveled to the US in April and met Vice-President Nixon, though he did not meet President Eisenhower. Following his return to Cuba, Castro's flirtations with the Eastern Bloc and visits to Moscow and Peking changed everything as his government moved drastically to the Left. Castro began introducing policies which were Marxist-Leninist and his party was renamed the United Party of Socialist Revolution. In January 1961 the USA severed diplomatic relations with Cuba, which only pushed Castro closer to the Soviet Union. At the height of the Cold War a Marxist state a few miles from the coast of Florida could not be tolerated by the US Government. The 100,000 or so Cuban exiles who had fled to Florida in early 1959 did not intend their exile to be permanent and began planning to overthrow Castro. Military aid to the Cuban exiles who had fled their country after 1959 was strictly limited at first, with the CIA plans calling for the training of a 30-strong guerrilla force. This would be landed in Cuba and would set up a covert radio station for the government-in-exile. Plans were soon escalated, however, after a cabinet meeting in March 1960 and included the training of a much larger ground force with its own air and naval element. With an approved budget of $13 million, the exile force named the "Brigada Asalto 2506" or "Brigade 2506" was prepared to invade Cuba in early 1961. The intention of the Bay of Pigs Invasion was never to try and conquer Cuba with a thousand men. It was instead to establish a bridgehead on the island and bring over a provisional government to rally support. Strategists thought that there was enough genuine anti-Castro feeling in Cuba on which to build a popular movement. The original plan had called for the landing of Brigade 2506 on the coast closer to the Escambray Mountains, where rebels were fighting Castro's army. Instead the landings would take place on beaches in the Zapata Swamp, which was the largest wetland in the world. The US military advisors had reservations about the plan and thought it was almost certainly doomed to failure. For one thing the air support that the exile air arm could give would be insufficient unless all Cuban Air Force planes were destroyed. There were simply too few planes to destroy Castro's planes in the three air bases that were to be targeted.

**A Cuban exile volunteer of Brigade 2506 looks nervously at his captors from the revolutionary armed forces in April 1961. He is being interrogated by the officer on the left of the picture, while the militiamen and a T34/85 tank driver pose menacingly behind him. The survivors of the brigade were treated roughly by their captors, but nearly all were to survive their imprisonment. They were humiliated by the Cuban authorities and eventually issued yellow t-shirts to replace their camouflage uniforms. These were meant to symbolize the nickname given to them by Fidel Castro of "Yellow Worms," which he claimed reflected their cowardice during the fighting. (Cody Images)**

## Assault Brigade 2506

The Cuban exiles' military force began with a nucleus of only 28 men but by September 1960 had grown to 160 men. It took its name from the serial number of one of its earliest volunteers, "2506," who had been killed during a training exercise. Its size was limited not by the lack of volunteers, but at the insistence of the CIA. When it reached its strength of 1,300 men it had a small parachute battalion, the 1st, and three infantry battalions, the 2nd, 5th, and 6th. In addition, there was a heavy weapons battalion, the 4th, and an armored battalion with five M41 Walker Bulldog light tanks, the 3rd. The 7th Infantry Battalion was held in reserve at its training base in Guatemala and did not take part in the Bay of Pigs invasion. The brigade was fairly lightly armed, with its heaviest weaponry being three 75mm Pack howitzers, some 57mm and 75mm recoilless rifles, and 15 81mm mortars, as well as a few light tanks.

## The Cuban Revolutionary Army in 1961

A short time after the revolution, the new Cuban Army had been expanded from the 3,000 or so men of Castro's forces to a standing army of 25,000 men. It soon became obvious that there would be armed opposition to Castro's government, so by late 1959 there were 38,000 men enrolled. Plans were also in place for a large militia force to be formed, which was to soon reach 250,000 men and women. Initially Castro tried to arm his troops from a variety of sources and was fortunate to benefit from the arrival of 24,000 modern FN FAL automatic rifles from Belgium. These had been ordered by the Batista government before its fall and presumably paid for by the previous regime. Heavier weaponry that came from Western sources included 15 British Comet tanks and about 20 OTO Melara 105mm howitzers from Italy. As Castro looked increasingly to the Soviet Bloc for arms, modern tanks and other heavy weaponry arrived from this source just before the Bay of Pigs fighting. The Cuban Army received four modern T-54 battle tanks, 36 T-34/85 heavy tanks and 60 BTR-40 armored personnel carriers. A few SU-85 self-propelled guns also saw action during the 1961 fighting alongside 122mm heavy artillery and various modern Soviet anti-aircraft guns. Militia fighting against the Cuban exiles were armed mainly with Czech vz. 52 semi-automatic rifles or Sa vz. 23 sub-machine guns. Although these small arms were not the best available, they were as good as many regular armies had in 1961. To help integrate these new weapons into the Cuban Army, the first 3,000 of many Soviet and Czech military instructors had also arrived in late 1960. The Cuban Air Force (FAR) had a mix of prop-driven and jet aircraft with a number of Hawker Sea Fury FB 11 fighters and Lockheed T-33A jet fighters left over from the pre-1959 period.

**Cuban militiamen parade at the time of the Bay of Pigs invasion armed with brand new FN FAL assault rifles ordered by Batista from Belgium but delivered after the victory of Castro. By 1960 the first shipments of modern arms were arriving in Cuba from the Eastern Bloc, mainly from Czechoslovakia. This meant that in 1961 the invading Cuban exiles were outgunned in both quantity and quality by Castro's troops. (Cody Images)**

## The Air Campaign

In the build-up to the invasion of Cuba by the exiles, their pilots were being trained to fly B-26B bombers by Alabama National Guardsmen who had been hired by the CIA. The Cuban exiles' air arm was intended to support the landings and to bring in supplies once a bridgehead had been established. Its transport element was made up of eight C-46 Commando and six C-54 large transport planes. Bombing and strafing missions were to be undertaken by 16 B-26B Invader light bombers, all of WWII vintage. These planes were based in Nicaragua before the invasion and were marked with fake FAR insignia. The original plan had called for a large force of B-26B bombers to totally wipe out the Cuban Air Force. President Kennedy interfered at the last minute and reduced the total number of bombers to be involved in pre-emptive strikes on the airfield to only eight planes.

This smaller strike force proved to be inadequate for the role they had been given and their failure was to cost the invasion dearly. In the early morning of April 15, the first air strikes by the Cuban exile air force were launched from their bases in Nicaragua. The strike force was made up of eight B-26B Invader attack bombers flown by Cuban pilots. In the first air raid the invaders attacked La Libertad Air Base, destroying at least one Sea Fury fighter on the ground. For the rest of the day the Cuban exile planes bombed other air bases and destroyed many of the FAR's aircraft. By nightfall the FAR only had two B-26C bombers, two T-33 jet trainers/fighters and three Sea Fury FB 11 fighters operational. However, the surviving FAR aircraft were to prove decisive during the campaign destroying landing ships and craft. After the initial raids by the brigade's B-26Bs any further attacks were limited, and the final one on April 19 ended with the deaths of two volunteer US pilots.

## The Invasion Fleet

A secret navy had been organized by the CIA to transport Brigade 2506 to their landing points in Cuba. It was made up of five Cuban registered cargo ships, the Rio Escondido, Houston, Atlantico, Lake Charles and Caribe. Most were loaded with supplies and ammunition for the invasion force, with enough on board to sustain 15,000 men for 15 days. The hope was that anti-Castro volunteers would come forward and so extra arms and ammunition were needed for the invasion. In addition, there were two US Navy-surplus LCIs or Landing Craft Infantry, which would act as command ships during the invasion. Another eight smaller landing craft were also part of the fleet, with one loaded with the five M41 Bulldog light tanks of the brigade. Thirty 16ft aluminum power boats were to be used to get the first troops ashore as soon as possible. Two landing points had been chosen for the brigade to come ashore at the Bay of Pigs, with the first at Playa Larga at the head of the bay “Red Beach.” The main landing point was at Playa Giron to the east of the bay and its codeword was “Blue Beach.”

## The Fighting

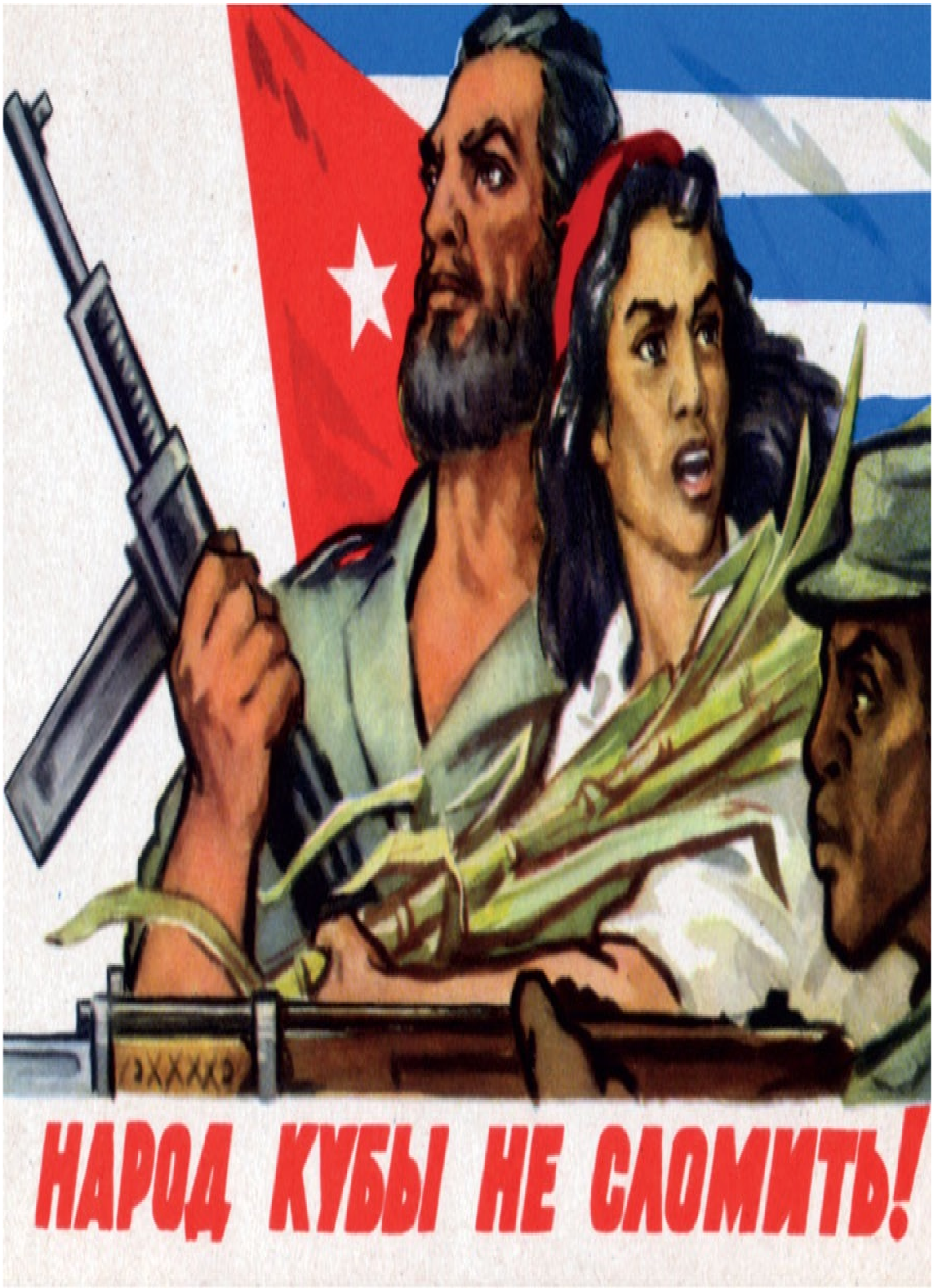
On the morning of April 17, the first Brigade 2506 troops came ashore at the main landing beach at Blue Beach. The first men ashore were a handful of specially trained frogmen sent to secure the beach and deal with any Cuban militia or other military. Five miles further north at Red Beach, the first troops ashore gave away their positions to local Cuban forces when their signal lights were inadvertently switched on. Radio alerts were immediately sent to any available forces and local militia began moving to intercept the invaders. Meanwhile, at Blue Beach the landings were going well and most of the vehicles and heavy equipment were ashore.

The main brigade units that landed on Blue Beach spent the first day of the invasion advancing northwards, taking the village of San Blas, while smaller units moved eastwards and westwards along the coast. From Red Beach the exile forces advanced north-eastwards through Zapata Swamp towards the village of Palpite. Meanwhile, thousands of Cuban militia and regular army units were converging from the north towards the brigade’s newly established positions. By the second day there was heavy fighting in both sectors of the invasion front, with Cuban Government T-34/85 heavy tanks clashing with the lighter M41 tanks of the brigade. A force of 30,000 revolutionary militia was now surrounding most defensive positions held by the brigade. They were under orders to pin them down until the regular army under the personal command of Fidel Castro could get to the front line. At sea, two of the most important of the brigade’s supply ships, the Houston and the Rio Escondido, had been sunk by air attacks by the FAR. The loss of these ships was a major blow to the brigade’s chances of success, as they began to run out of ammunition. In addition, the loss of fuel onboard the two supply ships meant that no air base could be established on the island. Any air support for Brigade 2506 would have to fly from their bases in Nicaragua, while the FAR could operate from their nearby airfields. Although the FAR only had seven available aircraft, they flew constant bombing and strafing attacks against the brigade. The final blow for the counter-revolution was the lack of support from the anti-Castro guerrillas. These often-isolated bands of anti-Castro fighters were usually fighting for their own survival and were not in a position to come to the brigade’s aid. In addition, the hoped-for popular uprising against Castro never materialized, as any possible supporters were terrified of his retribution if the invasion failed. A major failure of the invasion’s CIA planners was the fact that they did not inform any of their agents in Cuba about the timing of the invasion. Any assistance that these agents could have given the brigade was nullified by their total surprise when the operation began. Although also taken by surprise, as soon as Castro heard about the invasion, he ordered the arrest of anyone who could be considered a threat to his government. Castro had also been offered as much assistance as he needed from the Soviet premier, Nikita Khrushchev. He knew that as long as the USA did not intervene directly it was only a matter of time before he dealt with the outnumbered and outgunned brigade.

Throughout the second day of the fighting, the situation for the Brigadistas got gradually worse. They came under increasing pressure from the militia and expected at any time the arrival of the regular army. A bold counter-offensive on the 19th by the brigade’s 3rd Infantry Battalion and the paratroopers temporarily threw back the Cuban Army. When the Brigadistas ran out of ammunition they had to return to their defense lines and wait for the Cuban counter attack. By the end of the third day of fighting, the brigade’s positions at Playa Larga had been overrun and the Brigadistas at Giron were looking to escape the advancing Cuban Army and militia. Some got away on rubber boats to the waiting evacuation ships, but the vast majority of Brigade 2506 fell into enemy hands.

## The End and Aftermath

The exiles suffered a total of 40 dead during the landings at the Bay of Pigs and 80 during the fighting once they landed. A total of 1,180 volunteers from Brigade 2506 were taken prisoner and were held for up to a year in poor conditions fully expecting to be executed. After a show trial they were released, but only after the payment of $50,000,000 in ransom or compensation from the USA. The failure of the Bay of Pigs invasion emboldened both Castro and his Soviet sponsors, who in 1962 upped the ante in their struggle with the USA considerably. A U2 spy plane flying over Cuba on October 14 revealed that the Soviet Union had installed nuclear missile sites on the island. These missiles could strike most mainland US cities in a matter of minutes. Some senior officers of the US military called for an immediate invasion of Cuba, but President Kennedy decided on another strategy. He ordered a naval blockade of Cuba by the US Navy and any ships sailing to the island were searched for military equiment. President Kennedy then threatened the Soviet premier, Nikita Khrushchev, with the prospect of a US invasion of Cuba unless the missiles were removed. In their turn the Soviet Union pledged to support Castro and the two super powers were on the brink of a nuclear war. Finally, Khrushchev and Kennedy reached an agreement. The Soviets would remove their missiles from Cuba. In return, the US gave a guarantee not to invade Cuba and removed its own missiles deployed in Turkey, although this last term was not made public. This agreement was reached without any consultation with Castro, who was livid that he had been ignored during the crisis.


НАРОД КУБЫ НЕ СЛОМИТЬ!

**This Soviet propaganda postcard of 1962 idealizes the struggle of the Cuban people, guerrillas, women and soldiers against the USA. With its proclamation “Cuba Impossible to Suppress!” it emphasizes the newly won support of the Soviet Union for Castro’s threatened regime. The Cuban dictator was able to rely on constant financial and military support from the Soviets until the fall of the Communist system in Russia in the 1980s and 1990s. (Cody Images)**

**Haitian militia otherwise known as the "Tonton Macoutes" march past the presidential palace in the capital, Port-au-Prince, in May 1963. Officially this parade was supposed to commemorate the end of Haitian dictator Francois "Papa Doc" Duvalier's term of office as chief executive. However, Duvalier had no intention of stepping down from power and went on to rule the impoverished Caribbean country until his death in 1971. Surprisingly few of the militiamen are armed, with the only visible rifle being an aged M1903 Springfield. Perhaps the reason that these men are poorly armed is because really the deeply paranoid Duvalier trusted no one, not even his "loyal" Tonton Macoutes. (Cody Images)**

## Haiti "Papa Doc" Duvalier and the "Tonton Macoutes"

The dictator of the Caribbean island of Haiti from 1957 until his death in 1971, Francois "Papa Doc" Duvalier ruled his poor people with fear. Although he had been initially elected, he soon began to repress the people of the poverty-stricken island, and crushed all political opponents. His main instrument of repression was not the small Haitian Army, but a force of militia officially called the Volontaires de la Securite Nationale or VSN but more commonly known as the "Tonton Macoutes." The Tonton Macoutes were named after a mythical voodoo bogeyman who came to steal children in the night. Formed by Duvalier's chief aide, Clement Barbot, the VSN reached an estimated strength of between 9,000 and 15,000 men and women. They were mainly recruited from Port-au-Prince's slums, and with no official salary, the Tonton Macoutes simply took money from the people they terrified. Although most were poorly armed with old rifles and hand guns, the Tonton Macoutes only had to face a handful of rebels with even fewer weapons during the dictator's rule. The regular Haitian Army was in a poor condition when Duvalier came to power, with one US observer describing it as "deplorable." In July 1958, Duvalier's control of Haiti was challenged for the first time by a small-scale invasion of the island. Made up of three ex-Haitian National Guard officers and five US mercenaries, the invading force was soon destroyed. All its members were killed in a suicidal attack on the main army barracks in the capital, Port-au-Prince. The fact that Haitian officers were involved led Duvalier to purge 80 percent of the army's officers, with most fleeing abroad. Although the USA did not approve of Duvalier's rule, the Cold War and the proximity of a hostile Cuba ensured that he was left in power. They did try and bolster the 5,000-strong Haitian Army, and in the early 1960s US military advisors tried to improve its performance. They sent the better officer cadets to the United States for further training and ran training courses for the rest of the army in Haiti. They also supplied some modern weaponry to the army and the small air force and navy. A few P-51 Mustang fighters and T-28 light ground attack planes were added to the air force and were able to counter the anti-Duvalier rebellions of the 1960s. The army also got a few modern M113 armored personnel carriers and V-150 armored cars to add to the nine M3A1 light tanks they had received in the 1940s and 1950s. The extremely paranoid Duvalier was, however, unhappy with the success of the US advisors in improving the officers' training and with the arrival of modern weaponry. He saw that the tanks and planes could be used against him by the better educated officer corps that the USA had created.

With his internal security forces and the ever loyal Tonton Macoutes, he managed to hold onto power in the early years of his rule. However, it looked like Papa Doc's rule might be prematurely over when he suffered a massive heart attack in May 1959. His friend and political supporter Barbot took over as interim leader while Duvalier was ill and when the dictator made a full recovery he immediately stepped down from this role. The heavily paranoid Duvalier suspected that his friend had enjoyed ruling Haiti in his absence a little too much, and his fate was sealed. Barbot was arrested in July 1960 and held in the notorious Fort Dimanche prison, where he – like thousands of his victims – was tortured. Surprisingly, he was released in February 1962 and began plotting his revenge against Duvalier. In April 1963, Barbot and his supporters struck and tried to kidnap the Duvalier family to force the dictator to resign. This plot failed and Barbot and a few of his men were cornered and killed on July 14. As in 1958, military officers who were suspected of supporting the plot were killed as a bloodbath was ordered by Duvalier. Other plots and rebellions followed in 1964 and 1967, sometimes supported by exiles living abroad. On every occasion the defeated rebels and their families were dealt with by the Tonton Macoutes, often being killed after prolonged torture in Fort Dimanche. It was a relief for the vast majority of Haitians when on April 22, 1971, Papa Doc's rule finally ended with his death. One of his sons, Francois "Baby Doc" Duvalier, was duly installed as the new president and the people hoped he would be a kinder dictator. It did not take long for them to realize that “Baby Doc,” although not quite as cruel as his father, was just as, if not more, corrupt than “Papa Doc.” Baby Doc was in power until 1986, when he accepted the US Government’s offer of a comfortable exile for him and his family.

## The Dominican Republic 1965

After the assassination of the dictator of the Dominican Republic, Rafael Trujillo, in 1961, the Caribbean island nation fell into increasing chaos. Even though the brutal dictator had been responsible for the deaths of 60,000 people during his 31 years in power, he had given some stability to the country. Trujillo’s successor was Joaquin Balaguer, who was immediately faced by unrest in much of the country and was forced to resign in early 1962. The situation in the Dominican Republic was being carefully monitored by the US Government of President John F. Kennedy. He did not want the emergence of another Cuba less than a year after the fiasco of the Bay of Pigs. In December 1962, the Dominican Republic had held its first free elections for nearly 40 years. The victor in the election, Juan Bosch, surprisingly established an efficient government that promised to introduce social reforms and to ensure political freedom. However, in the heightened tension and paranoia of the Cold War, the Kennedy administration saw these policies as being soft on Communism. Bosch was duly overthrown in a right-wing military coup in September 1963 with the encouragement of the USA. He wasn’t harmed during the coup but was immediately deported and was replaced by a three-man junta led by Donald Red Cabral. This ad-hoc government continued the corrupt practices that had been a feature of the Dominican Republic for many years.

## The Civil War

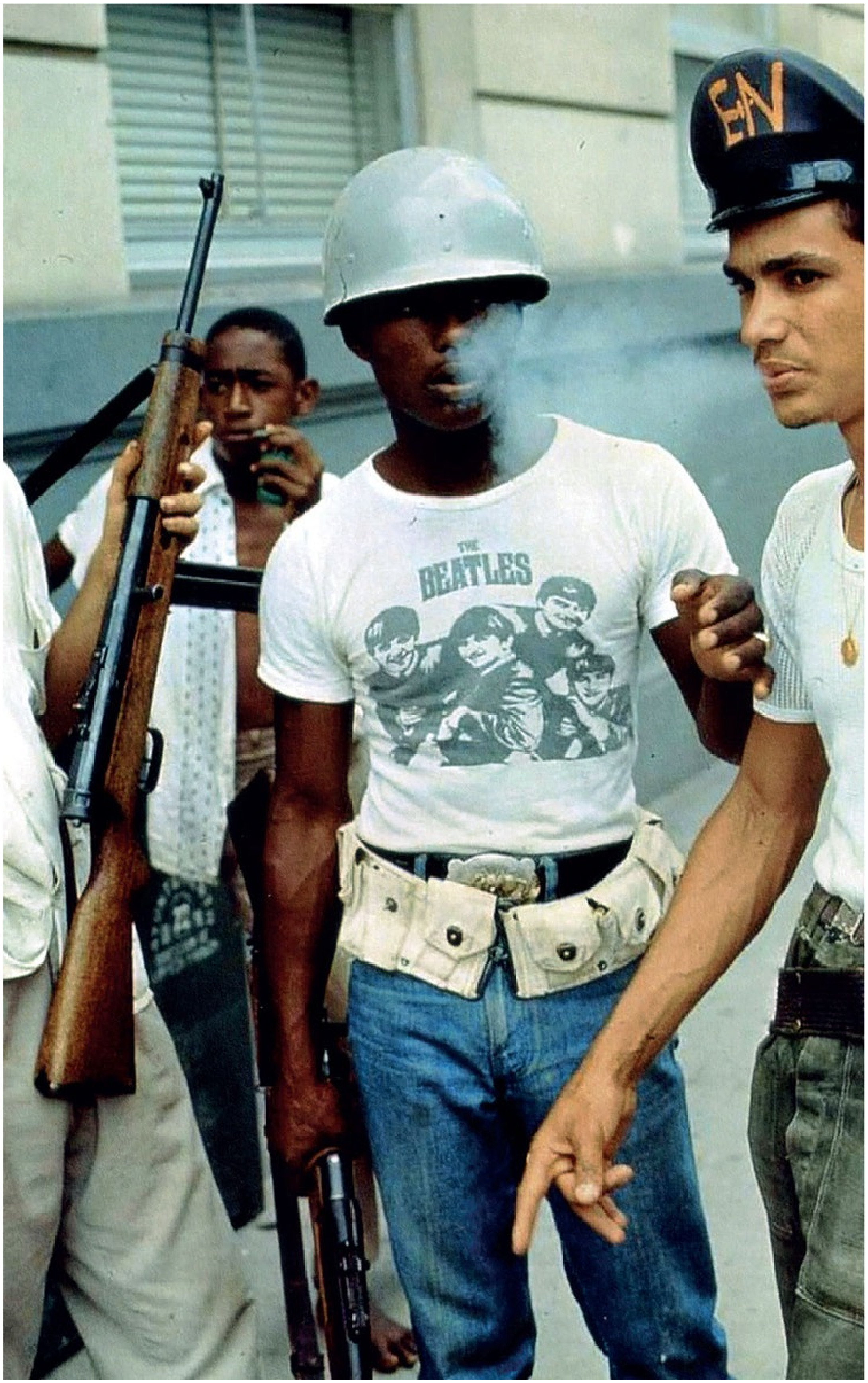
On April 24, 1965, young army officers organized a revolt whose aim was to return the popular Bosch to the presidency. Calling themselves

“Constitutionalists,” the rebels were led by Colonel Francisco Caarmano Deno. He organized enough men to seize the National Palace and take over the center of Santo Domingo. One of the rebels’ first targets was the seizure of all radio stations in the capital so that they could begin broadcasts to the people. The rebels then armed any civilian volunteers who were willing to fight for them and prepared to defend the capital from gathering right-wing forces. In total the Constitutionalists had 1,500 regular soldiers fighting for them along with 5,000 hastily armed civilian fighters. They were soon faced by a better organized force under the command of two extreme right-wing generals, Wessin y Wessin and Imbert Barrera. Wessin and Barrera established their headquarters at the San Isidoro Air Base, 12 miles east of the capital, Santo Domingo. The right-wing Loyalists had a far superior force with 2,200 troops and, decisively, a large number of armored vehicles. These included 24 of the WWII-era Swedish L-60 light tanks and 12 modern French AMX-13 light tanks. In addition, they had 13 WWII-era Swedish Lynx M39/40 armored cars.

A few poorly organized Constitutionalist attacks against the air base were launched by the rebels, but these were easily repulsed by the better trained and armed defenders. The pro-government forces then went over to the offensive on April 27, and crossed the Ozama River on the outskirts of Santo Domingo. They had the support of their tanks and other armored vehicles as well as the air support of a few aircraft. The Constitutionalist defenders were determined to defend the capital and soon noticed that the tanks were not escorted by infantry. Armed with Molotov cocktails, they approached the tanks and began to set fire to a number of them. They also put the beleaguered tanks under intensive fire from rifles, machine guns, and mortars they had captured from the army. During the confusion the rebels were able to capture several of the tanks that had been abandoned by their crews. As the Loyalists retreated back to their stronghold at the air base, the rebels collected together arms, which they would soon need to fight a new enemy.

**Dominican Republic soldiers supporting the military junta fire towards rebel positions in the center of the capital, Santo Domingo, on May 17, 1965. They are being supported by a M50 Ontos six-barreled 106mm recoilless rifle carrier of the US Marines. Although the M50 had been used during the Vietnam War, it never saw action against enemy tanks. One did, however, take part in an armored battle with two aged rebel L-60 light tanks in April 1965 alongside a US Marine M48 heavy tank. The one-sided battle ended with the destruction of the two Swedish-made L-60s, which were of WWII vintage. (Cody Images)**

**Brazilian soldiers of the international intervention force in the Dominican Republic in 1965 assemble at Santo Domingo Airport. A total of 2,000 troops drawn from Brazil, Honduras, Costa Rica, and Nicaragua took over from the 21,000 US troops who had intervened in the civil war. Under the auspices of the Organization of American States, these men joined the remaining 18,000 US soldiers and acted as a peace-keeping force until September 1966. (Cody Images)**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**Rebel Constitutionalist soldiers gather on the streets of Santo Domingo in 1965 waiting for a reaction after their overthrow of the government of the Dominican Republic. The insurgents wear a mixture of captured military and civilian items, including a Beatles t-shirt. One of the rebels is armed with the locally made Cristobel semi-automatic rifle, while another has a Mauser rifle. The man in the helmet appears to be enjoying some recreational marijuana before going into battle against the Loyalist forces. (Cody Images)**

## US Intervention

There was no way that the USA was going to stand back and watch the Dominican Republic be turned into another Cuba with an anti-American government. After observing the fighting between the two factions, Lyndon B. Johnson, the US president, decided to intervene militarily in the Dominican Republic. Reports had come into Johnson that the rebels had already been infiltrated by Cuban volunteers. He had hoped that the right-wing Loyalists would be able to deal with the Constitutionalists without US help, but by late April this seemed unlikely. In the Cold War atmosphere and with the Cuban situation still uncertain, he did not want another pro-Soviet regime in the Caribbean. President Johnson then ordered a large force of US Marines to land on the island in order “to ensure that US lives would not be in danger.” On April 28, an initial force of a battalion of 500 US Marines from the 6th Marine Expeditionary Brigade was sent to form the vanguard for a much larger force. The Marines were landed by helicopter in the center of Santo Domingo and established a perimeter around the US Embassy. Their main task was to evacuate any US citizens and friendly foreigners from Santo Domingo, and they did get 1,176 out on the first day. The next day the number of Marines was increased to 1,500 with another 300 infantrymen. This force was joined by US armored vehicles, including LVT amphibious personnel carriers, M50 Ontos anti-tank vehicles, and the M48 heavy tanks. On April 29 Operation Power Pack was initiated, which saw the 82nd Airborne Division being air lifted into the Loyalist-held San Isidoro Air Base. The remaining units of the 6th Marine Expeditionary Brigade joined them, bringing the total of US forces up to 21,900 men. Their orders officially were to remain neutral and simply restore order to

Santo Domingo and the rest of the Dominican Republic. They were to impose a ceasefire between the two warring factions, which meant advancing into Constitutionalist-held territory. As they advanced into the center of the capital, they came under sniper fire from rebel lines and were given permission to return fire. A running battle then began, which included tank versus tank battles between the rebels' L-60s and AMX-13s and US Marines' M48s. This one-sided battle saw several rebel tanks blown to pieces, with one AMX-13 having its turret blown off by one of the Marines' M50 Ontos anti-tank vehicles. US Marines also claimed the scalp of a rebel-crewed gunboat that was shelling their positions – it was sunk by an M40 recoilless rifle. Gradually the US Marines and paratroopers took hold of Santo Domingo and forcibly separated the two factions. It soon became clear that they would not just have to fight the rebels, but also the Loyalists. By May 5, a ceasefire had been imposed, although sporadic fighting continued, as both factions were unhappy with this deal. During the days after the imposition of the ceasefire, a Loyalist P-51 fighter even attempted to attack US positions and was duly shot down. A civil-military junta of "neutral" Dominicans was also imposed on the two factions with US support to run the war-torn country. When the fighting began to die down the US withdrew the Marines, leaving the 82nd Airborne Division to keep the peace. The US had already decided to internationalize the situation in the Dominican Republic by bring in other troops from Latin America.

**Guatemalan commandos are given anti-guerrilla training in a CIA-run training camp in 1966. The USA supported any Latin American country fighting against the “evil” of Communism in the 1960s. This training of Special Forces helped to drastically improve the performance of the army in fighting anti-government guerrillas. Forces like the Bolivian Rangers, who hunted down Che Guevara in 1967, made the life of rural guerrillas extremely difficult, and many gave up the fight. (Cody Images)**

## The OAS Involvement

In order to deflect criticism of their intervention in the Dominican Republic, the USA then organized an “Inter American Peace Force” to take over from their troops. It was to consist of the remaining 18,000 US paratroopers as well as a oversized battalion of Brazilian soldiers with 1,130 men, along with a company each of Costa Ricans, Nicaraguans, and Hondurans totaling 2,000 men. They were to be under the command of Brazilian General Hugo Panasco Alvim and were to remain in the Dominican Republic until elections could be held in 1966. With the Latin American contingents being under the banner of the Organization of American States, the USA could claim to be washing its hands of the whole affair. The fighting, however, was not finished, with the rebel Constitutionalists deciding to make one last effort to seize power. They launched a determined attack with their remaining tanks and mortars against Brazilian and US 82nd Airborne positions on June 15. Although the battle was fierce the Brazilians and US troops only suffered a total of 30 wounded, whereas the rebels lost 67 men. The funeral of the dead rebels was to see yet another clash, with 300 Loyalist troops attacking the procession. It was a chance for the two bitter factions to try and settle some scores but it ended with a US-imposed ceasefire. In yet another twist in the tale, one of the Loyalist leaders, Wessin, unhappy about his loss of power under the new junta, attacked Santo Domingo with a few tanks. His supporters lost heart, however, when faced by a US force sent to block him and Wessin was escorted to the airport and exile. Democratic elections were duly held as agreed by the USA in 1966 and the former Trujillo puppet president, Joaquin Balaguer, was elected. Although Balaguer was seen as a compromise candidate by the US, he was highly unpopular with left-wing and Liberal supporters. His election did, however, bring some stability to the Domincian

Republic and end the bloodshed, which had resulted in the deaths of an estimated 4,000 Dominicans. In addition, nine US Marines and 18 paratroopers had been killed during the war with another 172 wounded along with six Brazilians. In an effort to stabilize the still volatile situation, the right-wing leader Francisco Caamano was sent into exile to join his co-commander Wessin. He moved to London to serve as a military attaché but was unable to give up on his dreams of power. He returned to the Dominican Republic to lead an anti-government insurgency and was captured in battle and summarily executed.

## Latin American Left-Wing Guerrillas, 1960s

In the 1960s, most Latin American countries appeared to be ripe for revolution and many left-wing sympathizers dreamed of starting their own insurrections. The blueprint for revolutionary success had of course been set by the Cubans and their successful revolution of 1959. However, every left-wing movement in Latin America apart from Cuba had soon been crushed by the authoritarian regimes they were fighting against. By the early 1960s, nearly every Latin American country had its own Marxist revolutionary group, and they usually had a guerrilla wing. The vast majority of these revolutionaries looked to Castro and his Cubans to show them how to achieve a successful revolution. At the same time the military dictatorships of Central and South America looked to learn from the mistakes made by Cuban dictator Batista. They trained their own counterinsurgency forces and beefed up their police and their intelligence services. Left-wing guerrilla groups were usually split into rural and urban types, with the geography of the country often dictating where they operated. For instance, in Uruguay the vast majority of the population lived in a few big cities, meaning rural warfare was out of the question. What was the use of a few guerrillas operating in the countryside with just a few people to spread the revolutionary message to? Castro was more than willing to support these left-wing groups and began helping them shortly after coming to power in 1959. Once Castro had established his revolutionary credentials, he was fully behind the export of revolution to anywhere in the world, but especially the Third World. In 1966 Castro tried to get Communist China and the Soviet Union to co-ordinate an anti-USA guerrilla organization throughout the Third World.

Although China was keen the Russians were more cautious, and Castro knew he would be wiser to act alone. Since 1962 the Cubans had been training 1,500 foreign left-wing volunteers a year, who would return to their homelands to begin their own revolutions. Venezuela had been the first target for Cuban subversion since 1959, with the country's oil industry seen as a huge incentive to overthrow its government. If the country could be brought into the Communist fold then the world oil markets, which at the time were the crucial vehicle of capitalism, could be disrupted. After several years of urban terrorism in the capital, Caracas, and other big cities as well as attacks on oil installations, the Fuerza Armadas de Liberacion National or FALN were close to achieving their aim by forcing a military takeover. By 1964 there were FALN guerrilla bands in eight of the country's 20 states, but there was only a total of 200 fighters in these bands. In 1966 the Cubans were reported to be sending volunteers and arms into Venezuela, but there was little real support for the guerrillas. When a general amnesty was offered to the rebels in 1968, most guerrillas accepted realizing their rural struggle was failing. In Paraguay in 1958 the Colorado Party organized armed groups in neighboring Argentina who crossed the border to start an insurgency supported by Venezuela. These "Pynandi" or "barefoot" militia soon earned a reputation for savagery, torturing anyone who failed to support them. Another left-wing group, the United National Liberation Front or FULNA, was formed in 1960 but failed to receive support from the largely conservative peasantry. By 1970 both of these left-wing groups had been destroyed with the vast majority of their fighters killed, often after brutal torture. Some left-wing political theorists in Latin America advocated the setting up of so-called Armed Self Defense Zones in regions not entirely under government control. These zones would be defended by local militia, who would be expected to fight any government forces that tried to enter their territory. In reality the zones proved indefensible, and the men defending them had to revert to guerrilla warfare in the jungle or mountains. In Colombia the government launched an annihilation campaign in 1964–65 against the Armed Self Defense Zones set up by the rebels. The 533-day campaign involved 16,000 troops and succeeded in destroying all of the zones. This forced the rebels into classic guerrilla warfare, with two principal guerrilla forces emerging in the aftermath of the army offensive. These were the Army of National Liberation with 100 fighters operating in north-eastern Colombia and the Colombian Revolutionary Army with about 200 guerrillas and operating in the south and south-west of the country.

**A well-armed group of Venezuelan FALN guerrillas rests in the jungle while on a mission against government forces in the mid-1960s. This left-wing group was supported by the Cuban Government and most of these men are armed with ex-Cuban Army FN FAL rifles. In 1962 200 youths traveled to Cuba and were given training by their military instructors, before coming back to Venezuela to fight the government. (Cody Images)**

In the early 1960s the Peruvian left-wing leader Luis de la Puente made the mistake of proudly advertising his intention to set up a guerrilla base. He was confident that his base, which was in the supposed impregnable mountain massif in the Andes, would protect his fighters. However, the guerrillas were destroyed in a matter of months having not gained any support from the Indian population around their base. In 1965 a new rural guerrilla movement, the Revolutionary Left Movement or MIR, was formed and began fighting the Peruvian Army on three fronts in the central and southern regions. The Peruvian Indian population proved to be enthusiastic supporters of the MIR, and many joined the guerrillas. MIR guerrillas employed the "foco" system in the Labotan and Bejar regions, which involved seizing territory and establishing guerrilla bases with the intention of drawing in government forces that could then be destroyed. The foco system had already been discredited, and its use led to the rebels' total defeat by December 1965. They chose to fight in heavily populated mountainous regions with little cover to protect them from army and air force attacks. The Indian supporters of MIR were to suffer terribly at the hands of the Peruvian Army when the guerrillas were defeated.

Brazilian left wingers gained support in the wake of the unpopular 1964 coup d'état by the army. There were, however, a number of competing guerrilla groups operating in Brazil in the 1960s. The main group, Accao Libertadora National, never recovered from the death of its enigmatic leader, Carlos Marighela, who was shot in a police ambush on November 4, 1969. Maoist "Araguaia" guerrillas in northern Goias State were operating from 1966 with at their height a total of 150 fighters. Although they always struggled to survive against the Brazilian Army, they did have popular support from many Brazilians. In 1966 15 of their fighters were given secret military training in China, and the guerrillas continued to fight the government into the mid-1970s. In Guatemala, the Rebel Armed Forces or FAR was formed in 1961 with a mainly peasant rather than middle-class membership. In the late 1960s the Guatemalan Army began an anti-guerrilla campaign backed by the USA, which was shocking in its savagery. The total number of FAR supporters who were killed in eastern Guatemala was estimated at between 2,800 and 8,000. Another group, the Movimento Revolucionaro 13 Novembre or MR-13 was also defeated by the sheer savagery of the government response. Both groups operated in eastern Guatemala with a combined strength of 300 guerrillas, and the MR-13 did receive some support from Cuba. Neither group received much support from the Indian population but relied on the ethnic Spanish population to fill the ranks. The FAR and MR-13 relied for 80 percent of their weaponry on captures from the Guatemalan Army, and they unusually refused help from Cuba. Although most left-wing groups had been defeated in most Latin American countries in the 1960s, some other groups emerged in the 1970s. For instance, the Argentinian Trotkyist Revolutionary Army of the People began operations in 1970 and helped towards the downfall of the military dictatorship in 1973. In Nicaragua, the FSLN or Sandinista National Liberation Front organized an insurrection in 1978, which failed, but the following year its Sandanista fighters defeated the Somoza regime. El Salvador had two left-wing guerrilla groups, the FPL or Fuerzas Populares de Liberacion fa Abundo Marti and the ERP or People's Revolutionary Army of El Salvador, both formed in 1970. These groups went on to fight a long and bitter civil war with the right-wing El Salvadorian Government in the 1980s.

## Che Guevara's Nancahuazi Guerrilla Campaign in Bolivia 1966–67

The Argentinean revolutionary Che Guevara had decided in the early 1960s to try and export revolution from Cuba to the rest of Latin America. In 1966 he chose Bolivia as the most likely starting point for his revolutionary campaign. His first mistake was to choose a region of Bolivia that was so remote that his actions there would not affect the government in the distant capital, La Paz. He and a few Cuban followers arrived in the Santa Cruz region in eastern Bolivia in November 1966 and were joined by several dozen Bolivian revolutionaries. In total there were 29 Bolivians, 25 Cubans, three Peruvians, and a few other foreigners including Che himself and a female East German journalist. The region was so remote and inhospitable that Che and his force of 60 struggled to find enough food and other supplies to maintain their campaign. Another problem was that the local Bolivian population was not as supportive as Che had expected. It was clear that if his guerrilla campaign had been successful, they would have supported him once the government of President Rene Barrientos was doomed. Che had been guilty of believing his own propaganda, expecting any peasants to follow him purely because of his revolutionary reputation. There was equally no support from the traditional left-wing parties in Bolivia, and relatively few Bolivians joined his guerrilla group during his campaign. Che was upset when striking Bolivian tin miners who had been in dispute with their government settled their grievances. He had hoped that if their dispute had escalated, he might gain more volunteers and support from the Bolivian people. His constant frustration with the Bolivians was summed up by his quote, “Talking to these peasants is like talking to statues. They do not give us any help. Worse still, some of them are turning into informants.” Some communication problems with the locals were a result of Che and his men having learned the wrong Bolivian dialect. The guerrillas’ military campaign did have some initial limited successes, which was not surprising bearing in mind the experience of his Cuban volunteers. Any success that the guerrillas did have did not, however, affect the rest of Bolivia, which was totally unaffected.

Che and his exploits in the remote region of a remote South American country no longer made world headlines. His men were having enough trouble just surviving in an inhospitable environment and things were not going to get any better. The guerrillas were reduced to eating mule meat most of the time and could not maintain a healthy diet, and they began to fall ill. They were also facing a Bolivian Army that was a much tougher proposition than the Batista army that Che had fought in the 1950s. It included units of Bolivian rangers totaling 600 men that had been trained in counter insurgency by US military advisors and Cuban exiles. They also had to contend with the small but efficient force of P-51D Mustang fighters of the Bolivian Air Force that strafed the guerrillas whenever they were spotted. By August 1967, any hope of fermenting a Bolivian revolution had faded and Che and his followers were at a low ebb. On August 31, eight of his men and the East German woman were ambushed at the farm of Honorato Rojas and killed. They had stopped to ask for food and their position was reported to the local military, who waited for them. The farm was far to the north of their main camp, as they were having to travel further afield to find food and other supplies. Che was not with this group and his small remaining band managed to avoid the Bolivian Army forces encircling them. There were about 1,800 Bolivian soldiers closing in on Che and the remaining guerrillas and they were constantly receiving intelligence from local peasants. The guerrillas were finally ambushed to the west of the Rojas farm on October 8, at a place called La Higuera, by a unit of Bolivian rangers, and a two-hour firefight ensued. Che was wounded twice in the battle and most of his group were killed, with the survivors being dragged back eastwards by their captors through the jungle to a farmstead at Quebrada del Yuro. There was never any intention to keep Che alive, and after a night spent in a hut, word arrived from the Bolivian president ordering his execution. It was left to a lowly Bolivian sergeant to enter the hut where Che was being kept prisoner to shoot him on the morning of October 9. As he confronted Che Guevara the executioner hesitated, and Che screamed at him, “Shoot coward, you are only shooting a man!” The sergeant had been ordered not to shoot him in the head, and instead he shot him several times in the arms and legs before finishing him off with a bullet in the chest. Che’s body was then lashed to the skids of a helicopter and flown to a nearby town, where it was put on display in a laundry room. His body was photographed from every angle and was arranged like a hunting trophy for the press. Bolivian officers gathered around his body with genuine pride for having killed the world-famous revolutionary. His hands were then chopped off as proof of his identity and the rest of his body was buried in an unmarked grave. A handful of his men survived his death and struggled through the jungle looking desperately for a way out of Bolivia. On February 17, three Cubans and two Bolivians finally reached the Bolivia–Chile border and crossed it to freedom. The abject failure of the imported revolution was followed by the growth of a home-grown guerrilla movement in Bolivia. This Bolivian movement had as much success as Che had and had been defeated by the government by the mid-1970s.

**The body of the recently executed Che Guevara lies unceremoniously dumped on a stretcher in an outbuilding in the Bolivian jungle in early October 1967. His band of guerrillas had been cornered in the jungle by US-trained rangers on September 26, and he had escaped with a few of his men. On October 8, Che and his last followers were ambushed and he had been wounded when captured. During the early hours of October 9, he was shot at point-blank range by a Bolivian officer. Afterwards his body was displayed like a hunt trophy for the gathered press, as if to prove that the "great" revolutionary was really dead. (MARC HUTTEN/AFP/Getty Images)**

## The Football War – July 1969

In the late 1960s relations between the two Central American countries of Honduras and El Salvador had become extremely tense. The dire economic situation in El Salvador and the overcrowding of the country had led 350,000 Salvadorian peasants to try and settle in neighboring Honduras. Even though the per-capita income of El Salvador was slightly higher than in Honduras, the density of their population caused a shortage of affordable farmland. The Salvadorians found that they were able to farm land as squatters in the far less densely populated countryside of Honduras. These migrants were unwanted guests in Honduras and the military government of General Oswaldo Lopez Arellano used them as convenient scapegoats. Fate played a hand in June 1969 when the two nations were drawn against each other in the qualifying rounds for the 1970 FIFA World Cup. During the two qualifying legs, away fans were attacked by the home fans and rival mobs of rioting nationalists. Many Salvadorian migrants now felt unsafe and began fleeing back to El Salvador in their thousands. Some had been attacked by rioting Hondurans and a number of them had been killed, but the numbers were exaggerated by the El Salvadorian Government. On June 25, the two governments requested that the Organization of American States should investigate the mistreatment of their citizens by the other country. On the 27th, the two countries cut off diplomatic relations and began planning to “settle their differences” by military means.

**The Honduran Army was bitterly divided in 1969, with at least three cliques amongst its officers based on their politics. Some were far-right-wing extremists, while others were left-wing Liberal supporters. Corruption was also a major problem in the army, with most officers on the “take” and having little interest in the troops under their command or their welfare. With only 2,500 men, the Honduran Army was much smaller than its El Salvadorian foe and had fewer heavy weapons. They did, however, have a number of paramilitary security forces, who would be used as front-line troops when the fighting began. The largest was the 2,500-strong Special Security Corps, whose personnel could be quickly converted into combat troops. With only a single battery of US 75mm M116 Pack Howitzers and some 57mm recoilless rifles, mortars, and bazookas, the Hondurans were totally outgunned. During the 1950s the Hondurans had been supplied by the USA with 15 US Staghound armored cars, 15 M3A1 Scout cars, and ten M24 Chaffee light tanks. It is not certain how many of these vehicles were still serviceable in 1969, but none were available to take part in the fighting. When it came to small arms, most of their soldiers were armed with the M1 Garand rifle, M2 carbines, and M1919A4 light machine guns. The Honduran Army was organized into 23 companies, including the National Guard and the artillery battery.**

**The Salvadorian Army had 4,500 well trained regulars and a large number of reserves who could be called into action if necessary. When the war began the reservists were called up, giving the army as total strength of 15,000 men. The expanded army was organized into 15 infantry regiments and 15 reserve infantry battalions. In addition, there were two special service units and an engineer group, and two paramilitary forces. These were the 3,000-strong National Guard and the 2,000-strong National Police, both of which were armed and trained to a similar standard as the regular army. The single cavalry regiment had been partially mechanized with a few improvised armored personnel carriers and armored cars. The Salvadorian armored unit did have three ancient CV 33 Italian tankettes of pre-WWII vintage bought from Italy in March 1938, but none were serviceable in 1969. They also had a handful of US M5A1 Stuart light tanks, which were used on the Northern Front during the war. Some locally made “Lightning” armored vehicles built on a truck chassis were also employed by El Salvador in the Eastern Theater of the war. Bank security vehicles were also utilized as armored troops carriers and were given the nickname “Ninos.” One advantage that the Salvadorians had over their Honduran foes was their 24 105mm M101 howitzers used in both war theaters, and also their 75mm Pack Howitzers employed in the Eastern Theater. When it came to small arms the Salvadorians also had the advantage of some modern German H&K G3 assault rifles. These were used alongside the WWII-vintage M1 Garand and M2 carbines and some elderly but still useful Madsen M1934 light machine guns.**

## Early Ground Fighting – July 12–13

From July 2 onwards, there were a number of border skirmishes between the two armies. This fighting mainly took place in the north-western border region and was usually between patrol-sized units. Heavier clashes took place on July 12 and 13, with mortar and small arms fire being exchanged along the entire border between the two countries. While this small-scale fighting was going on, the Salvadorians were preparing their land and air forces for an offensive against the Hondurans. Their intention was to invade Honduras and overthrow the government of President Oswaldo Lopez Arellano in 72 hours.

When it came to the two combatants’ air forces the situation was reversed, with the Hondurans having an advantage over the El Salvadorians. El Salvador only had 11 combat planes, with their fighter force made up of “veteran” US WWII types. They had a few P-51 Mustangs and F4U Corsair fighters and only five C-47 transport planes. Their only other aircraft were six North American T-6 trainers, which were not convertible to fulfil the role of light bombers. Although they had 1,000 personnel in the air force, the Salvadorians had a severe shortage of pilots. This shortage was the main reason that the El Salvadorians had not purchased any more aircraft during the 1950s and 1960s. It was far more expensive to train a pilot than it was to buy “surplus” WWII-era aircraft. But the El Salvadorians did have the advantage of a small number of volunteer civilian pilots, who flew reconnaissance missions in their own light aircraft.

Honduras had a much stronger air force with a total of 50 planes, their combat arm being made up of 12 F4U Corsair fighter bombers and three Lockheed RT-33 jet trainers used as reconnaissance planes. They also had six T-6 trainers, which, unlike the Salvadorian ones, could be armed as light bombers if necessary. That was also the case with their three T-28s, which could be converted into light strike planes. Their transport wing was also slightly stronger, with six C-47s and a single C-54 heavy transport plane, and they also had three Sikorsky H-19 helicopters.

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**A surviving example of the F4U Corsair fighters of the Honduran Fuerza Hondurena or FAH used in the 1969 war against El Salvador. A number of these planes had been acquired by the Hondurans in 1956 and 13 years later were showing wear and tear. The El Salvadorians also had a few Corsairs as well as a handful of WWII-era P-51D Mustang fighters. Continued use of prop-driven fighters in Latin America was often down to the relative cost of operating jet fighters for the poorer countries. (Bernardo Moncada/Wikimedia Commons/CC BY 3.0)**

## The Air War – July 14–15

The Salvadorian military command were admirers of the Israel Armed Forces and especially their air force and had studied their tactics during the 1967 Six Day War. They knew that the Hondurans had an advantage in the air and wanted to offset this in the same way that the Israelis had against the Arabs in 1967. They planned a pre-emptive strike against the Honduran air bases on the evening before their army launched its ground offensive. Unfortunately for the Salvadorians, the Honduran aircraft had been dispersed from their main air base at Toncontin near the capital, Tegucugalpa, to the north-west. In total the Salvadorians had eight fighter-bombers to carry out the raids, and these were flown by inexperienced pilots, described as “green kids” by some observers. As the Salvadorian planes were about to leave their bases in El Salvador, two crashed into each other on the runway. Another lost its way, leaving only five to carry out their ground attacks on what turned out to be largely empty Honduran airfields. At the same time, a lone C-47 transport converted into a bomber was dropping bombs over the Honduran capital with little effect. There was not time for a Honduran response before it got dark, so retaliatory strikes had to wait till first light on the 15th. These were undertaken by a Honduran C-47, also converted to operate as a makeshift bomber. Its crew, like the Salvadorian crew before them, had to throw explosives out of the plane’s door without the aid of a bombsight. Their target was the El Salvadorian air base at Ilopango, but little damage was done by this primitive bombing method. Another Honduran air strike in the early hours of the 15th was launched by four F4U Corsair fighters. In a “tit-for-tat” series of raids, both air forces attacked the enemies bases throughout the first two days of the war. El Salvadorian planes attacked Toncontin base again with a mixed force of F4U Corsair fighters and a P-51 Mustang fighter. This time the Hondurans were ready for them and chased them off with their own Corsair and two T-28 armed trainers. The Honduran Corsair's pilot continued to chase the Salvadorian raiders, even though its guns had jammed. In a decisive raid later that day, four Honduran Corsairs attacked the El Salvadorian port of La Union. More importantly, they attacked and largely destroyed El Salvador's oil storage facilities, which was to have an important consequence during the conflict.

**Honduran troops armed with US-supplied carbines and bazookas prepare to board C-47 transport planes during the “100 Hour War” in July 1969. They are on their way to north-western Honduras, which was under attack by El Salvadorian forces. Their objective is the town of Ocotepeque, which was being heavily bombarded by Salvadorian artillery. On the 17th the fighting effectively ceased, with a armistice being signed the following day. (Cody Images)**

## The Main Fighting Begins, July 14

The Salvadorian Army had been concentrated into two main areas of operation for its planned offensive. There were 3,000 men in the Northern Theater of Operations and 5,000 in the Eastern Theater of Operations. Another 2,000 men were evenly divided between the North-Eastern Theater and the Chalatenango Theater in the Chalatenango department. They were facing 3,000 men of the Honduran Army, who were stationed in small units all along the frontier. At dawn on July 14, two Salvadorian infantry battalions, the 1st and 8th, crossed the border in the region of the town of Nueva Ocotepeque in the Northern Theater of Operations. While the infantry advanced, a unit of Special Forces swept to the west, with their objective being the Honduran airfield at Nueva Ocotepeque. A 700-strong National Guard force began a flanking movement to the east and the combined force struck the Honduran defenses around Nueva Ocotepeque, overrunning them by the evening of the 15th. They then continued their advance deeper into Honduras while the main offensive was taking place in the Eastern Theater of Operations.

**El Salvadorian National Guardsmen celebrate the news that they are to return home from the battlefront on August 3, 1969. The territory they had captured from the Hondurans was handed over to officials from the Organization of American States. All of these troops are armed with West German H&K G3 semiautomatic rifles – a modern firearm for a Central American army at the time. (Cody Images)**

The main Salvadorian thrust now took place in the east, where their 5th Battalion had already been making inroads into Honduran territory. A main Salvadorian force made up of the 4th and 11th battalions advanced along a 20-mile front in the Goascoran-El Amatillo sector. They were supported by nearly all of the Salvadorian heavy weaponry, including a few M5A1 light tanks. Most of their 105mm field guns were also employed, meeting no counter fire from the small Honduran artillery force. In the northern sector of the Eastern Theater, the 5th Battalion was now given the objective of the town of Aramecina. Further to the south in the center of the Eastern Theater the 4th Battalion had the objective of Langue, while the 11th Battalion was to advance along the Pan-American Highway. El Salvador’s Special Forces were to advance north-eastwards from the border to link up with the 11th in its eastward advance towards Nacaome. A reserve of the 2nd and 3rd Battalions and the Salvadorian Paratroop Company was only to join in the fight if necessary. While the main offensive was going on, a small amphibious force made up of the 6th Salvadorian Battalion was to capture the Honduran island of Zacatillo and several smaller islands in the Gulf of Fonseca. They were transported to the islands on the Salvadorian Navy’s two patrol boats and some commandeered civilian boats. When they landed, they faced only minimal resistance from the few Honduran troops assigned to defend the islands.

In both the Northern and Eastern theaters of operations, Honduran troops tried to resist the superior forces facing them. Three weak battalions drawn from the garrisons of the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd military zones formed the main defense force of the Hondurans until July 16. As the fighting developed, they were reinforced by the 1st and 3rd infantry battalions and by the Presidential Guard, along with the battery of 75mm guns. The regulars were now joined by Honduran peasant volunteers, many of whom were armed only with machetes. These guerrillas attacked the now overextended Salvadorian supply lines, helping to halt their progress. They usually acted on their own volition, having seen that their regular army was losing ground. Despite the efforts of the Honduran regular and irregular troops, after a few days fighting the Salvadorian Army had taken the towns of Nueva Ocotepeque on the Northern Theater and El Amatillo in the east. They had advanced 9 miles into Honduras in the north and 16 miles in the east before halting. Both armies' ammunition was now running out and the Salvadorians were especially short of shells for their 105mm howitzers. Both armies were also exhausted, especially fighting in the heat of the Central American summer. The Salvadorians were also feeling the effects of the Honduran air attacks on their oil facilities, and their motorized units were running out of fuel. Meanwhile the war in the air continued, with a number of air battles taking place on the 16th and 17th. These dogfights were between the two air forces' prop-driven fighters, with one clash on the 17th between two Salvadorian P-51 Mustangs and a pair of Honduran Corsairs. The more experienced Honduran pilots came out on top, with one of the P-51s being shot down by the Honduran ace Major Fernando Soto. Soto was also to strike later that day when he shot down two Salvadorian Corsairs in another dogfight. This hat trick of aerial victories gave him the distinction of shooting down every enemy plane destroyed in the war.

EL SALVADOR
EL SALVADOR
1970

**The riots at the two football matches between Honduras and El Salvador in the qualification rounds for the 1970 World Cup stoked up the tensions between the two countries. El Salvador won the 1969 conflict and also qualified for the competition in Mexico the following year. For the record, the El Salvador team, seen in this souvenir card, lost all its matches in Mexico, losing 3-0 to Belgium, 4-0 to Mexico, and 2-0 to the USSR. (Author's Collection)**

## The End of the War

While the war had been underway, the USA and the Organization of American States had been trying to broker a ceasefire. The truce they organized called for the withdrawal of both armies to their respective borders. This condition annoyed the Salvadorians, as they were the only ones in possession of enemy territory. They wanted reparations for their citizens who had been mistreated by the Hondurans and delayed pulling their troops back across the border. Neither the less, the ceasefire came into effect on July 18, ending a war that had lasted five days and four hours. Sporadic fighting did continue in some sectors, but this was between isolated units who did not want to lose face by being the first to stop fighting. The cost of the war was borne more heavily by the civilian population, with about 2,000 killed, while total military casualties were less than 500. Up to 100,000 refugees had been displaced by the war, with the majority of these being Salvadorians who had fled Honduras. As a result of the war both armies expanded, with the Honduran Army rising to 10,000 men and the Salvadorian Army to 15,000. These were totals that neither country could afford, especially when both armies tried to buy expensive weaponry over the next decade.

The cessation of fighting in the Football War in July 1969 ended the 70 years of conflict covered by this volume. Over the next 30 years until the end of the 20th century, Latin America continued to be plagued by conflict. During the 1970s, right-wing dictatorships, often backed by the United States, flourished throughout the region but continued to be challenged by left-wing political groups and their armed guerrillas. Military juntas in Chile, Brazil, and Argentina led to severe oppression of the populations, and the latter country invaded the

Falkland Islands in 1982. The year 1979 saw the victory of the left-wing Sandanistas in Nicaragua and was followed by anti-revolutionary campaigns by US-backed Contra guerrillas in that country. A bitter civil war in El Salvador in the early 1990s saw brutality on a scale not seen for many years in the region. The 1995 Cenapa War fought briefly between Ecuador and Colombia showed that the age-old Latin American border disputes were likely to remain a source of conflict into the future.

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My first thanks must go to my wife Tracey who has supported me over the years with my passion for military history. Thank you, as always, to Paul V. Walsh for his research on my behalf and for information on Brazilian military history. Thanks also to Mayra Rosalina Barraza Dominguez, Dan Hagedorn, Ted Nevill, Carlos Planas, Carlos Rosa Mejia and Javier Yubi. My thanks also go to a number of Latin American military attachés in London and Madrid for helping me find information. I must also credit people like Adrian English and Terry Hooker who began the serious study of Latin American history in the West in the 1960s.

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OSPREY PUBLISHING

Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

PO Box 883, Oxford, OX1 9PL, UK

1385 Broadway, 5th Floor, New York, NY 10018, USA

E-mail: info@ospreypublishing.com

**www.ospreypublishing.com**

This electronic edition published in 2019 by Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

OSPREY is a trademark of Osprey Publishing Ltd

First published in Great Britain in 2019

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A catalog record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN: 978-1-4728-3352-5 (HB)

ISBN: 978-1-4728-3353-2 (eBook)

ISBN: 978-1-4728-3354-9 (ePDF)

ISBN: 978-1-4728-3355-6 (XML)

Maps by Bounford.com

Front cover: (top) Brazilian troops march past the reviewing stand during their country’s independence celebrations on 7 September 1936. (Cody Images); (bottom) A well-armed group of Venezuelan FALN guerrillas rests in the jungle. (Cody Images) Title page: A soldier of the Federal Army from a Mexican poster of 1942. (Cody Images)

Here: Image from a Soviet propaganda postcard of 1962. (Cody Images)

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